

## Introduction

University writing centers' work today encompasses more than just helping writers through the writing process. Writing centers frequently expand their reach into their local communities, beyond the borders of the university, to become active makers of positive change. One way this happens is through the creation of community writing centers.

As the first community writing center in the Hampton Roads area, the Tidewater Community Writing Center (TCWC) hopes to bridge the gap between ideas and their written expression. We offer support for writers of all backgrounds and abilities, for writers working in professional, creative, or personal capacities. Our staff is passionate about writing and building connections with other writers to help support each others' confidence in writing practice. We believe that by talking through ideas, writers can gain confidence and strength in their writing. TCWC provides the space where those conversations might materialize and—more importantly—continue.

## Outreach and Events

The TCWC was able to facilitate multiple events throughout the year, and surprisingly, our most popular service was our mindful journaling workshops. During these workshops, we were able to teach community members the importance and value of daily journaling. TCWC staff and community members were able to collaborate and discuss the benefits of mindfulness journaling, as it provides writers an avenue to set goals, organize their thoughts, and take a break from the static of our busy lives. In addition to our mindfulness journaling workshops, during the month of November, the TCWC was able to conduct a workshop for the National Novel Writing month (NaNoWriMo) at the Grissom Public Library. During this workshop, the TCWC gave advice to authors who were in the drafting phases of their own novels. Finally, one of our goals from last year was to work closely with high school students to help them in the college application process. We were able to hold a resume-building workshop at the Harvest Life Center for high schoolers interested in pursuing higher education. All of these workshops and events enabled the TCWC to create meaningful connections with a diverse range of community members which helped to broaden the types of services we provide.

In addition to the community-centered workshops we were able to create and facilitate, we were also able to share our experiences on a national scale. Ferguson Fellow Abby Asuncion and Co-director Nicole Emmelhainz had the recent opportunity to present the origins, objectives, and lessons learned as a new, non-profit community writing center at the Southeastern Writing Center Conference (SWCA) hosted in Memphis, TN. Additionally, the conference hosted several other events run by writing center scholars and experts from across the country.

At the end of October, Ferguson Fellow Leslie Bond and Co-directors Nicole Emmelhainz and Brooke Covington had the opportunity to travel internationally to Vancouver, BC, Canada to present in the 2022 Annual International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) Conference. The presentation focused on how writing centers find their place in the communities which they work with through a participatory workshop. While there, we were able to share the origins of the TCWC and lessons learned through its growth, and we got to hear a lot from a vast selection of other writing centers across the continent.

As the TCWC's model has changed from a university model to a community one, social media has changed with it. Ferguson Fellows Abby Asuncion and Leslie Bond created posts and promotional material throughout the year to post on social media and the website. Over the year, we have learned a community-centered approach works best, so we have focused content around workshops and community engagement. One series of posts included "Mindfulness Mondays" to coincide with our Mindfulness Journaling community workshops! We made changes throughout the year to the website to help direct it as a community writing center platform.

## Project Goal

The TCWC aims to provide the Newport News community a space where they can gain valuable feedback on their writing, whether for personal, school, or work-related pieces. Writing centers are more than just a grammar, fix-it shop. They open the way for a dialogue between consultants and writers to talk about more than just writing, but the process of writing and thinking. The predominant slogan of writing centers is that writing centers make better writers, not better texts. The very essence of the writing center method is communicating, which is exactly what we want to promote within the Hampton Roads community: a collaborative environment that creates an open dialogue.

Our main goal this year was to reach out to other community organizations in hopes of offering our services. This year, we were able to host several events including Mindful Journaling workshops, resume-writing seminars, and asynchronous writing consultations, to name a few. These various events enabled us to reach out to a broader audience. In addition, our writing center was recognized on a national scale where we presented our work at two conferences.



## Project Significance

Over the last year, the Tidewater Community Writing Center has grown from a place for writers to gain feedback into an organization into one that has reached out extensively into the community, bringing our services directly to various groups and allowing the community to guide our outreach. We have attended local community events, hosted interactive workshops, and expanded our reach both nationally and internationally. Our events and workshops have fostered deep connections and relationships with other community members and groups in the Newport News and Hampton Roads areas. We hope that these same efforts will continue for the years to come.

## Lessons Learned and Future Steps

One of the main lessons that we have learned going into our second year as a community writing center is to be flexible. Although we originally planned for the TCWC to function in a similar manner to that of a university writing center, our expectations completely changed after conducting our first, successful mindfulness journaling workshop. Over the span of a year, the TCWC has transformed in its goals and purposes, and we have learned to be adaptable, to bring services directly to the community, and to prioritize building partnerships. From readjusting our values to align with community needs and presenting at conventions across the continent, the TCWC has certainly made an impact on the growing community. That being said, there is always room for improvement.

Future steps include furthering outreach through a more consistent use of social media as a marketing strategy. We hope to increase our following base by being more active on all social media platforms. In the future, we strive to continue building our name and reputation within the community. A larger social media presence may help increase the turnout at TCWC-hosted events and workshops.

## Contact Information

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