

Take the Writing Center to Class

STUDENTS who seek out the Norman H. Ott Memorial Writing Center at Marquette University have tended to self-select, making appointments on their own initiative. In the spring of 2015, Rebecca S. Nowacek, the center's director and an associate professor of English, decided to cast a wider net. "We wanted to be more directly and aggressively building relationships with writers and faculty we weren't seeing otherwise," says Nowacek, "instead of waiting for writers to come to us."

So she started the pilot Course Embedded Tutors (CET) program, in which undergraduates trained as writing tutors are placed in courses in the humanities and other subjects, such as investment banking and physics. Since then, 35 tutors have worked with students in 36 courses. All tutors must go through a competitive application process, take a for-credit class on tutoring taught by Nowacek, and participate in three tutoring workshops.

The tutors then meet with the faculty member teaching the course to discuss assignment goals and anticipate common writing challenges. Two weeks before a paper is due, tutors collect drafts, return them to students with comments, and hold one-on-one conferences. The instructor receives both the early version of the paper with the tutor's comments and the revised version.

The goal is not "a pile of A papers," says Nowacek, but rather to convey that planning,

organizing, and revising are critical components of high-quality work.

Students find the face-to-face peer relationships helpful. "I could ask my CET stylistic or structural questions that seemed superfluous to ask my professor," says Corrine Conway, a senior who worked with a tutor in a cultural-anthropology class.

Because the tutors have not taken the course themselves, they focus strictly on helping students write. Now a tutor, Conway recalls being "terrified" when given her first papers to read, in an electrical-engineering course. "I don't know how circuits work!" she says. "But as long as we can understand what the students are being asked, we can help them with it."

Writing tutors receive a stipend for their work, and the program is funded primarily — and at times, solely — by the writing center. In late 2015, the program won an internal innovation grant. Based on campus feedback, Nowacek expects the program to thrive. She

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estimates that embedded tutoring has helped hundreds of students in the past three years. "We really want to be a writing center that serves the entire university," she says.

THE CHALLENGE

Help students who aren't coming to the writing center improve their writing skills.

THE APPROACH

Create a program that embeds student tutors in courses across several disciplines.

THE RESULT

The writing center has expanded its reach by roughly 20 percent.