Unsung Heroes of the Pandemic
How The Writing Center’s consultants have adapted during COVID-19, updates about our virtual services, and alumni news
udmercy.edu/twc  TWC Update, Fall 2020

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What we do in The Writing Center
The Writing Center’s peer and professional writing consultants can assist students with brainstorming, drafting, revising/editing strategies, proofreading strategies, reading comprehension, critical thinking, and ESL-specific strategies. We can also assist students with citation styles like MLA and APA formatting, and strategies for avoiding plagiarism. Students applying to graduate school will find TWC consultants are good resources for personal statements and internship essays. While we don’t do the work for students, we do help students learn along the way by keeping them empowered to make their own writing decisions. All of our appointments are online and are scheduled in 30-minute increments.

Online Hours of Operation:
Mondays 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.
Tuesdays 10 a.m. - 8 p.m.
Wednesdays 10 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Thursdays 10 a.m. - 8 p.m.
Fridays 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.

For more information
udmercy.edu/twc

Schedule an Online Appointment
udm.mywconline.com

A Note from The Writing Center Coordinator, Cindy Spires:
On March 12, 2020, TWC consultants made an unprecedented move to working fully from home to ensure the student services we offered could be continued in a safe, effective way given the necessary push for social distancing. Staff and student safety was a top priority, and TWC was lucky because we already used an online-tutoring-enabled interface for students. As the transition to working from home happened, all veteran and newly-hired TWC consultants were prepared with additional training and support.

Since then, TWC consultants have continued doing an amazing job adapting to the challenges of a fully-online work environment, as well as to the challenges that were inherent to students having to adapt to online coursework, and staff having to adapt to working from home. Over the summer, with our limited staff, we continued refining our online consulting best practices and worked out effective solutions for dealing with technology troubleshooting in anticipation of our busiest semester of the year: the fall! While our office is temporarily closed for in-person meetings, we are thriving in our synchronous, online sessions.

I would like to commend each and every TWC consultant for his and her hard work, commitment to students and to the quality services we offer, and to an easy-as-can-be-expected transition to fully online consulting [in order of years of service]: Stuart Tucker, Vania Noguez ’20, Michael Kostuch ’20, Mary Kate McNally ’20, Amber Abram, Sara Abudulelah, Monica Bean, Ken Dada, Nicholas Blakey, Natalia Grasso, and DJ Leppek. And to my newly-hired consultants who have bravely jumped right in this fall: Nurzahan Rahman and Shermana Akter.

For questions about The Writing Center, please reach out to me anytime at spirescc@udmercy.edu.
Spotlight on TWC Consultants
How they’ve adapted & their hopes for helping others
udmercy.edu/twc ■ TWC Update, Fall 2020

I believe all of us, students and faculty alike, had to dig deep into our bag of skills to learn how to make online learning and teaching possible. It is no different for us here at The Writing Center. This summer, I took an eight-week online course on writing in the sciences at Stanford University. This course not only focused on writing, but it also helped me critique my peers’ writing online, which is something I hope to do a lot of this semester. As a student, I also took some time to reflect on what I did wrong and what I did right during the online portion of the winter semester. I hope to utilize and improve on the skills I learned to push through. I also hope to provide a productive and safe environment for students who are looking to visit The Writing Center. Our online software went through a complete transformation this summer, and it's now better than ever! This is a learning experience for all of us, but I hope we make the best of it!

-Ken Dada, Biology

To adapt as a student with the current pandemic, I've started getting into one of my older hobbies. By going back to my older hobby of drawing, it helped me to relax and not worry about what is going on around me. I feel like doing something outside of school and work that isn't just Netflix or binge-watching helped me keep my brain active but let me also not stress over it.

I feel like the way I can contribute to students is giving them normalcy and encouragement. Online classes can be really frustrating to students because focusing can be hard, and you can't really process information compared to face-to-face classes. When meeting with students, I would take a calmer approach and try to communicate more about how they're adapting to their lessons and be conscious about it while going through their paper.

-Shermana Akter, Computer Science

The main thing I've done is to keep looking forward, while embracing adaptation. One of the things I am personally working on is my ease of adapting and trying new things; I can get stuck on doing the exact same things for extensive periods of time if I am comfortable with them. It helps me stay true to who I am, but it also is a bit of a hindrance from self-exploration. The pandemic has taught me a few things about adapting, such as learning about the online setting and getting accustomed to it, moving forward with my schooling, and appreciating my appointments even more. We have all been struck by what has happened to the world, and we have to keep moving forward and embracing change.

One of the things I can contribute to TWC is a level of comfort. I treat all my consultees like my friends, and I hope that those who come to make an appointment can trust that we will help them in the best way we can.

-Nicholas Blakey, Cybersecurity

Did you know that The Writing Center’s consultants receive monthly training and professional development on topics like assisting students with personal statements for graduate school, ESL strategies, assisting students with grammar and punctuation topics, and topics related to anti-bias and anti-racism? **Reap the benefits of their extensive training by making an appointment with us at udm.mywconline.com.**
I've been doing a lot of writing to help me adjust to life since COVID-19. Whether it is for 30 minutes or a few hours, writing has really helped me escape the reality of what is going on. Recently, I have also made myself a schedule to help me be more productive and balance all my other responsibilities as an employee.

As a writing consultant at The Writing Center, I can help students adjust to the recent online setting by being encouraging, motivating, and understanding towards them at our appointments.

-Nurzahan Rahman, English & Education

Times like these during the pandemic can be tough; however, I have learned to adapt as a student and an employee at the University of Detroit Mercy. I have gone fully online and have all my classes online to reduce the possible spread of the coronavirus. I have also had experience taking writing center appointments online last semester and this semester. I have given back to my local community by volunteering and lending a helping hand to others. As a writing center consultant, I can help students with their papers such as brainstorming, grammar, formatting, and so much more. Learning in these times can be difficult; however, we are here to help.

-DJ Leppek, English & Business

When the pandemic hit, I moved off campus and back home with my parents. I’m sure many students can relate to this, but one of the hardest parts for me this school year is adapting to being away from my usual academic environment. It’s definitely been a struggle to flip that mental switch. The best thing I’ve been doing is just taking things like assignments slowly, one day at a time. I’m aware that everyone else is going through this pandemic too, so I just try to take it easy and focus on the things I can control!

I hope to contribute to a safe and secure environment for everyone that comes in. Know that we aren’t here to tear you down—it’s quite the opposite! I see so many people get in their own heads about their writing and become bogged down by their mistakes. I take pride in making sure every student knows their worth and that their voices have a right to be heard. Improving writing is a collaborative, constructive process; I hope that’s what I can continue to offer!

-Natalia Grasso, History & Political Science

The Writing Center has online appointments five days a week. Create an account and book your appointments with us at udm.mywconline.com.
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To adapt to the pandemic both as a student and an employee, I have been keeping my brain and my body stimulated though reading, meditation, and exercise. With every day that I do these things, I develop new ways and thought processes to help students.

To the students who visit The Writing Center, I can provide the knowledge that I have gained through my years at TWC as well as understanding and patience. I understand that we are all transitioning and learning how to thrive in our new circumstances.

-Amber Abram, Biology

I have adjusted to this pandemic as a student by doing some bedroom renovations. I got a desk and made my own little “classroom” to at least keep something semi-normal.

I feel as though, through The Writing Center, I can help create a safe, non-stressful environment, which we all need during this chaotic switch to virtual learning. By helping students with their papers, I hope to at least lower those stress levels a little bit, and lift their confidence in their writing abilities.

-Monica Bean, Biochemistry

It took quite a bit of time to adapt to the “new normal” caused by the pandemic. I was never a fan of taking classes online because I enjoyed being fully present with my professor and classmates, but over time, I learned to work with the new format. Something that was helpful and appreciated were check-ins from one of my professors who started each lecture by asking how we were doing. It was nice to share my feelings, both positive and negative, with individuals who were going through a similar situation.

As a consultant at TWC, I was sad that I was not able to see my students in person anymore. In the beginning of the pandemic, we were only able to use text to communicate with students through online appointments. I am thankful for the new features that now include audio and video, which made consulting so much more effective. During these trying times, I wish to be of support to my students. I will be as helpful as I can be.

-Sara Abduleelah, Biology

The Writing Center has synchronous text, audio, and video-enabled online appointments. Schedule your appointment with us at udm.mywconline.com.
More than anyone else in TWC, and beyond, Stuart Tucker has exemplified adaptation during the pandemic. Stuart has had the advantage of working for The Writing Center in one capacity or another since 1989, and he has seen many changes to how TWC delivers quality writing services to students. Stuart was with TWC before Mercy College merged with University of Detroit. Stuart is a self-proclaimed, “old school” kind of guy—he has always practiced his consulting in-person with students, preferring to keep his interactions with students face-to-face. But when the pandemic hit, and it was a necessity to adapt to online consultations, Stuart did not complain at all and hunkered down to get the job done.

In fact, Stuart has had the most obstacles to overcome at home with no computer, no wifi, and much less experience using the online consulting system than his student colleagues. But that did not stop him. After first attempting to use a Detroit Mercy computer that would not connect to the internet, he employed his vast network of musician friends for help, and someone came through with a laptop that he could borrow until he could get one of his own. He was also able to temporarily use a neighbor’s wifi until he could get his own set up, and in short order, he adapted to using his veteran consulting strategies in the online environment. Over the course of the summer, with his student colleague, Nicholas Blakey, Stuart continued expanding his knowledge of the computer for better overall troubleshooting and ease of daily use.

On behalf of the entire TWC staff, I would like to publicly thank and applaud Stuart for his service to this university despite the personal and the universal challenges it brought to him. He has exhibited true resilience in the face of so many obstacles.

WATCH HERE for an interview with Stuart!
(login using Detroit Mercy email credentials)

A Brief Interview with Stuart Tucker

How do you help your colleagues with their continued adaptations to working from home?
I report any session technology problems to our director, Cindy Spires. This is important because that way she can be “quick on the draw” in getting them solved and letting the other tutors know what to watch out for. I also contact tutors via Teams or their phones who might have a session right after my problem session to let them know what’s up. We also note our tech successes and failures in the Client Report Forms (CRFs) and bring up those that are significant in meetings.

How do you help students in online sessions now that they can’t see TWC consultants in person?
I make sure that I am still a cheery, inviting, helpful presence, and that I can explain quickly and nicely what procedures they need to do – load their paper in, have the prof’s guidelines handy, and discover how to navigate the website’s interactive features. Students have to engage in a lot of these moves lately, more than ever, but some of them can be confused or overwhelmed, which is completely understandable.

What advice do you have for students who want to come to TWC sessions online?
It’s virtually (hah-hah) pain free! You may have had your fill of online learning lately, but here you will find folks who care about your work and your academic success. We are able to attain a high level of pre-COVID service quality and are well set-up to help.

Do you have a piece of advice for students, staff, or faculty as they continue overcoming the obstacles of these monumental social distancing efforts?
Be comforted and confident that TWC was already functioning online before COVID hit, was already an option, so we were already on the racetrack. We already knew, at least a little, how to run that race. Hang in there, investigate your best relaxation techniques (I mean it!), and know that we will pass through this. It won’t always be this way.

To make an appointment with Stuart, or any other TWC consultant, visit udm.mywconline.com.
In this workshop, Senior Consultant Nicholas Blakey and veteran TWC staff member Stuart Tucker will lead students through a series of steps to work toward what they’re calling “deblindifying” academic writing. By learning to apply concepts of creative writing, like using similes and alliteration, Nicholas and Stuart hope to show students who are writing essays or research papers that they can add a little flair to their diction with a few fun steps.

Register for this Zoom meeting by clicking HERE.

In this workshop, Senior Consultant Sara Abdulelah and TWC Coordinator Cindy Spires will lead students through some common steps that will help them draft and revise their personal statements for grad school applications. Students applying to grad school in any field are encouraged to attend—Dental, Medical, P.A., Ph.D., Nursing, and other M.A./M.S. programs.

Register for this Zoom meeting by clicking HERE.
Since graduating this past May ’20, I started my first full-time job at Fiat Chrysler Automobiles. It has been exciting to start my new role as a buyer in the Purchasing department where I buy different commodities including brake hoses, wheel weights and inflator kits. It’s super cool to know that my negotiations result in purchases that will literally go on thousands of future vehicles. On the side, I continue my passion of tutoring English to international students on the platform HiLink and strive to continue learning things that help me make the world a better place.

I am currently at Michigan State University pursuing my Ph.D. in Pharmacology and Toxicology. I am so grateful for the opportunities I was given, such as working at TWC, doing research, earning a leadership minor, and serving as an executive board member for a couple of clubs on campus because all of these opportunities helped me grow personally, academically, and spiritually. The experiences I had as a result molded me into who I am today and earned me the Mission Award that I am ever so honored to have received.

Congratulations to Vania and Saamere on their successes while at Detroit Mercy. We wish them the best for their continued successes post-graduation!!!