

# Building on the Positive: Best Practices for Writing Centers

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# Symposium on the Potential Roles of Writing Centers in Japanese Higher Education

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Kodaira City, Tokyo, Japan  
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# Agenda

1. Brief discussion of what writing centers do and why they are a wise institutional investment.
2. Discussion of best practices and how effective writing tutoring is produced through creating positive intellectual, emotional, and physical spaces.
3. Review of data regarding Wellesley College writing tutors.

# Why do we need Writing Centers?

Most Colleges and Universities aim to:

1. Increase students' knowledge.
2. Make students more articulate about the knowledge they possess.

*Writing Centers help students develop in both these ways.*

# What Writing Centers do

- Provide one-on-one and small-group tutoring to students working in all academic disciplines and in courses from across the curriculum.
- Provide one-on-one tutoring to students working on application essays for graduate schools, fellowships, and jobs.
- Offer writing workshops on topics such as grammar, citation styles, moving from a topic to a thesis, introductions, conclusions, and so on.
- Provide reference materials and other resources for writers.
- Provide support for faculty and teaching assistants.

# Writing Centers are often located in or associated with one of these offices within an institution

Writing Department or Program

Writing Across the Curriculum Program

Teaching and Learning Center or Learning Commons

English Department

Dean's Office

# Positive, productive tutoring relies on:

1. An intellectual climate that is generative, builds on a student's knowledge and skills, and is connected to larger institutional goals.
2. Interpersonal connections that foster trust and shared responsibility.
3. Physical space that is welcoming, comfortable, and conducive to productive tutorials.



# Wellesley Writing Program

## First-Year Writing Courses

- Each student is required to take one semester of a WP course
- 42-44 sections per year
- 26-28 different faculty members representing 10-12 different academic departments
- 12-15 students per class
- Approximately 585 students enrolled per year



# Examples of first-Year Writing courses

*Introduction to the History of Art*

*The Novels of Jane Austen*

*Chemistry in the News*

*Wealth and Poverty in America: An Economist's Perspective*

*Environmental Ethics and Christian Traditions*

*Constitution 3.0: Freedom, Technology, and the Law*

*Wellesley and the World*

# Goals of first-Year Writing courses

“Provide a common introductory experience in college-level thinking and writing.”

“Help students establish a useful writing process, from developing ideas through revision.”

“Provide instruction in argument and the use of evidence; in organization, style, and structure; and in the conventions of academic writing, including writing from sources.”

<http://www.wellesley.edu/writingprogram>

Writing tutoring is in harmony with these goals and fosters a positive intellectual and emotional space in which to learn.



*Provide instruction in argument and the use of evidence; in organization, style, and structure; and in the conventions of academic writing, including writing from sources.*

- Tutors offer advice in points of writing, helping students to learn correct mechanics and to challenge and develop their ideas.
- Tutors focus on what a student is doing well and what in her paper she can build upon.

# *Help students establish a useful writing process, from developing ideas through revision*

- Tutors help students continue the work they do in their classes, breaking down the writing process into manageable steps.
- Identifying steps helps de-mystify writing: students see it as defined by constituent parts that they can control and manipulate, rather than as one organic mass that appears all at once.
- The act of going to a tutor reinforces the idea that advanced writing requires process, reflection, revision, and developing one's command of the topic and material.

*Provide a common introductory experience in college-level thinking and writing.*

- Working with writing tutors connects students with other students in a lower-stakes academic environment.
- This positive connection to others and to the larger community is especially important for first-year students.
- Students who work with writing tutors commit more time to their assignments.
- Peer tutors can readily sympathize with the challenges that students face.

# Tutoring in a positive physical space

- At Wellesley, most tutoring takes place in the Pforzheimer Learning and Teaching Center in Clapp Library (PLTC).
- The space is distinct from the book stacks and other areas.
- The space is open and bright, with tables and chairs, sofas, computers, printers, writing and study resources, and professional and student staff.
- Some tutoring also takes place in the Science Center and in Harambee House (a building providing space for study and socializing for students of color).



# Writing Tutor space from the exterior (Clapp Library)





# Entrance to Clapp Library



# Lobby of Clapp Library

*(Entrance to Pforzheimer Learning and Teaching Center at top left)*



# Entrance to Pforzheimer Learning and Teaching Center (PLTC)





# Entrance to PLTC



# Tutoring space and computers inside the PLTC





# Space for tutoring and study



# Tutoring and study resources





# Tutoring space and study resources





# Wellesley Writing Tutors 2012-2013

- 16 undergraduate tutors: 4 Sophomores, 6 Juniors, and 6 Seniors.
- Tutors' academic majors and minors included: Art History, Biology, Cinema and Media Studies, Chemistry, Chinese Language and Literature, Economics, English, History, International Relations, Music, Political Science, and Psychology.
- Offered about 70 hours of tutoring per week, with ~70% of those hours utilized.
- Cost for tutor training, salaries, materials: **~\$22,000/year.**

# Wellesley College utilization data (AY 2012-2013)

**Unique users:** Fall (332) and Spring (226)

**Total appointments:** Fall (1,050) and Spring (750)

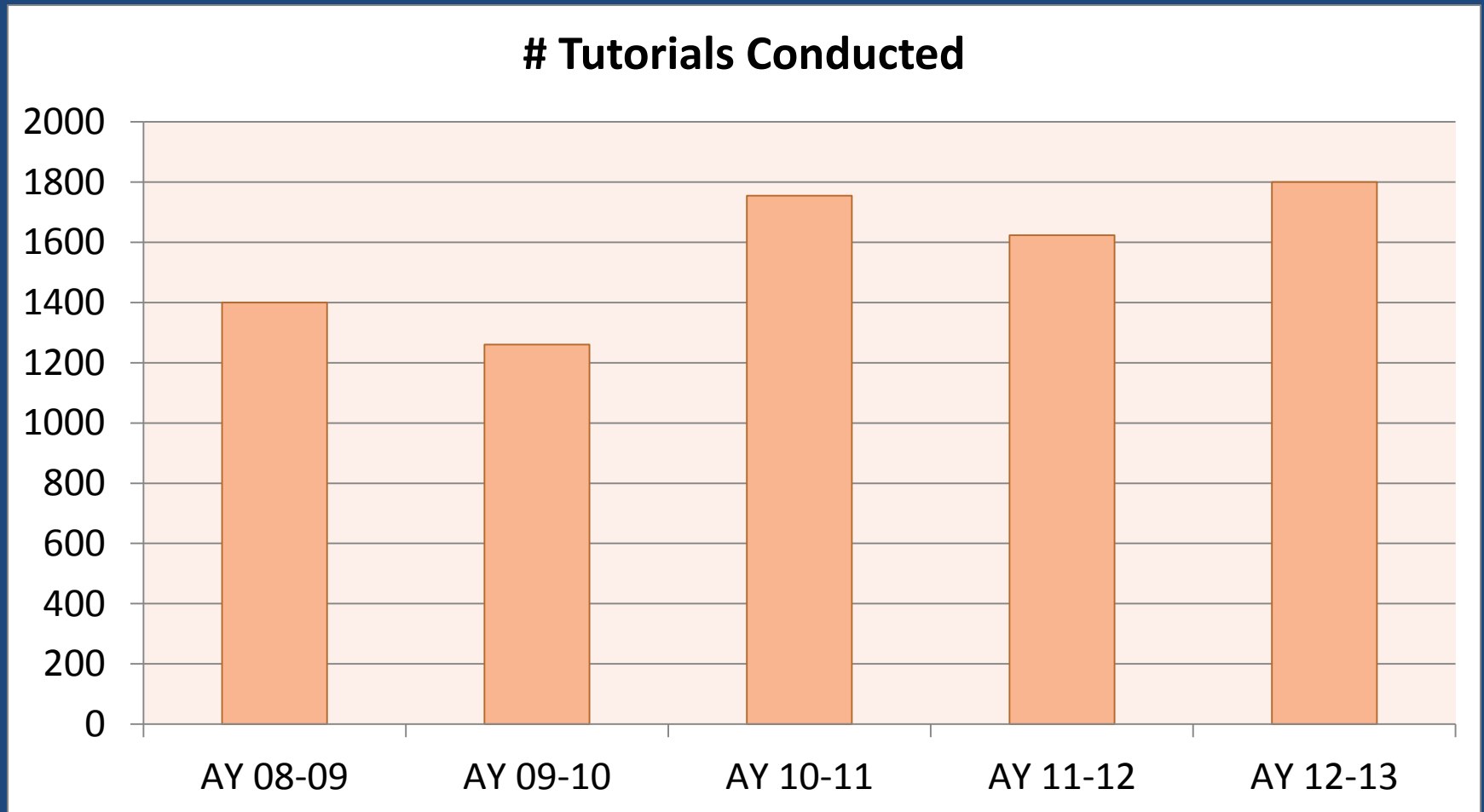
**Total number of tutoring hours:** Fall (656) and Spring (518)

**Users:** 55% First-years, 20% Sophomores, 15% Juniors,  
10% Seniors

Wellesley's *total enrollment* is approximately 2,600 students.

# Utilization of Writing Tutors

## 2008-2013



# Academic departments served by Writing Tutors 2012-2013

Writing (30%)

History (9%)

Political Science (9%)

Biology (6%)

Psychology (6%)

Philosophy (5%)

Women's and Gender Studies (5%)

English (5%)

+ 24 other departments and programs

# Why peer tutoring works

- It lowers the stakes for students, and puts the student in the position we want her to be, which is using her writing to teach her reader something, rather than simply demonstrate her having learned a lesson.
- The relationship is peer to peer, and the sympathy between student and tutor may thus be enhanced.
- It gives tutors extraordinary experience, helping them to develop their skills in writing and communication, as well as their confidence, responsibility, and leadership.
- It is cost-effective.

# Writing tutors are a valuable asset to colleges and universities

*Tutoring creates or takes place in positive spaces— intellectual, emotional, and physical— in which we can build a student's and a tutor's confidence and skill, contributing to their educational experience and to the larger success of the institution.*





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