Evaluation of Writing Support Program, Spring 2013 – Spring 2014

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Summary

The Writing Support Program (WSP) works to improve the quality of undergraduate student writing. This report focuses on the impact of writing skills workshops embedded in 18 classes, mostly in the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS). Average writing assignment grades improved from mid-term to final assignments for students that attended multiple workshops. A survey of faculty that collaborated with the Writing Support Program in these classes indicates they found the experience was useful and productive and that they would raise their expectations of student writing. While these findings point to success, it is important to bear in mind that these courses are not a random sample and there is no comparison group for the students, thus limiting the generalizability of findings to other courses or WSP services.

Introduction

The Academic Resource Center (ARC) piloted a Writing Support Program (WSP) in the winter 2013, initially as a two-year program. A guiding principle of the WSP is that writing is best taught in specific contexts but, at the same time, faculty members at a large research university may have limited ability to work closely with students on their writing skills. Thus, the WSP set the following goals:

G1) Introduce a unique writing support model centered on instructors' assessment of student needs and integration of writing support with instructors' course design.

G2) Improve academic support for undergraduate and graduate writers in select courses and academic programs of study.

G3) Improve the quality of student writing in select courses and academic programs of study.

G4) Support faculty who make demanding writing assignments.

G5) Encourage more instructors to raise their academic expectations for student writing.

G6) Harmonize writing instruction on campus and encourage students to transfer the writing skills they learn at UCR.

To meet these goals, the WSP partnered with faculty in a number of courses to provide writing skills workshops tailored to specific course content and demands. The WSP also provided support to Honors students writing their theses, open "walk-in" appointments in the Academic Resource Center (ARC), and other activities designed to improve the level of undergraduate student writing.

This report builds on two preliminary evaluations of the WSP. While one of these reports reached generally positive conclusions, the other was unable to draw any substantive conclusions because program data was somewhat incomplete and had poor statistical properties (low variation in key variables). Also, each report focused on just a few courses during a single quarter. This report is more comprehensive by covering a longer period of time (between summer 2013 and spring 2014) and drawing on student and faculty data from a larger number of courses. First, this report uses student data and scores from writing assignments of about 1,300 students in 18 academic classes. Second, this report uses data generated by Accutrack for about 1,800 students who visited the ARC for WSP services. This includes the time, duration, and type of services received, as well as responses to a short survey (during winter and spring 2014). Finally, there is a survey of 17 instructors who worked with the WSP; the survey was conducted in spring 2014.

Introduction of a Program Model Centered on Course Design (G1) and Improved Academic Support for Undergraduates (G2)

Table 1 lists major activities for the WSP from the summer 2013 to the spring 2014. The analytic focus of this report is on the subset of 18 classes, marked in bold in Table 1. In these classes, the WSP provided at least one workshop and gathered a complete set of rubric scores for at least one writing assignment[1]. There is substantial variation in the size of classes analyzed here, ranging from 16 to 500. Many are lower division courses in CHASS that satisfy breadth requirements. For most of these classes, the WSP offered two or three workshops. As shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**, about 80% percent of students attended at least one workshop. This count sums attendance across all workshops in all classes- some of which were held during class, some outside of class meetings but mandatory, and some outside of class and optional. Classes with optional workshops (e.g.: Art History 008) account for most of the (21%) student who did not attend a single workshop.

As shown in Table 3, there were 1,504 students in the 18 classes analyzed. These students have cumulative UCR GPAs that are all similar to, although slightly lower than, the average for all students. Relatively few students in these classes are freshmen, and almost one-third are seniors. Students in WSP supported courses are, like the classes themselves, disproportionally associated with CHASS and, to a lesser extent, SOBA. The small differences observed in the variables for gender, race, percent of first generation students and percent low income students are, in turn, driven by the demographic makeup of CHASS students.

The WSP also provides services for students in the ARC. A total of 1,826 students signed into ARC for the period of summer 2013 through spring 2014. These services include office hours, scheduled appointments for revision on written assignments and workshops for WSP supported classes. About 20% of the students[2] in this data were both in a WSP supported course and visited the ARC to use WSP services. (The extent of this overlap is largely an artifact of which WSP supported classes are included here.) As shown in Table 3, WSP participants who visited the ARC, like those who participated through courses, have academic measures that are similar to all UCR students. Freshmen and women use WSP services in the ARC at greater rates than one would expect based on the demographic profile of all UCR students.

As shown in Table 5, these 1,826 students signed in to use WSP services at the ARC a total of 4,312 times. The average number of visits across the year was 3.6, although this varied from an average of 2.3 during the summer 2013 to 4.3 in the winter 2014.[3] Freshmen and CHASS students are more prevalent among those who visited three or more times, when compared with those who visited just once. There are three times as many women as men among these multi-visit users.

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[1] For some of the total 35 classes the WSP provided just one topical workshop or some other low level of support. Data suitable to quantitative analysis was not collected for all of the classes with higher levels of support because of, in some cases, miscommunications about the rubric or, in other cases, constraints in time and resources.

[2] Of 2,576 unique students associated with the WSP, only 750 were in WSP supported classes with data analyzed here, 1,237 only visited the ARC and 589 were in a supported class and used the ARC.

Whether one counts individual students or total visits, the spring 2014 and fall 2013 saw more traffic than winter 2013 and summer 2013. When broken down by the week of the quarter, there is some tendency for these visits to cluster earlier in the quarter.

A five question survey was also conducted of students who used WSP services at the ARC. About 1,600 students took this survey asking them to provide feedback regarding how much they learned about three specific features of the writing process (brainstorming, forming thesis statements and writing body paragraphs) as well as the writing process in general. Results are shown in Table 4. The average across all items and respondents is 3.48, almost the exact middle of the scale, indicating students neither strongly agreed nor strongly disagreed that the WSP had provided useful services. It is uncertain whether this lack of endorsement speaks to shortcomings of the WSP activities or to students' discomfort in engaging with shortcomings of their own writing. [4]

Improve the Quality of Student Writing (G3)

Quality of student writing is evaluated using data generated by WSP program staff who assessed student's mid-term and final-papers. Graders used rubrics which focused on: (1) *thesis* statements, (2) *organization* and cohesion, (3) engagement with course *content*, (4) overall *focus* on assigned topic, (5) adherence to the conventions of *grammar*, (6) cohesion of *paragraphs*. Modifications were made for specific courses, such as additional categories for course content or adherence to particular stylistic guidelines (such as the APA Manual). An example of the general rubric can be found in Appendix 1. There are two important points worth making about these rubrics. First, by asking the grader (or evaluator) to assign zero to five points on each of a set number of relatively specific features of writing these rubrics provide more detailed and specific information- both here and to the students who wrote the paper- than when a paper is given a single letter grade. Graders also received training on the rubrics, which should reduce the subjectivity across evaluators. Second, there is a literature on rubrics that suggests they can provide benefits for both teacher and student[5], so their use may itself represent a desirable end.

Error! Reference source not found. presents mean scores for mid-term and final writing assignment rubrics for all students (across classes), where both are present. Rows with two asterisks indicate significant differences in means from the mid-term to the final using a paired t-test (with significance defined as $p < 0.05$). In all areas there is an improvement, and for all but grammar the difference is significant. These improvements range from about one-tenth to one-half of a point on the five point rubric score. On balance, the picture is less uniformly positive when classes are examined individually as in the tables in Appendix 2.[6] One way to interpret these observations is

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[4] Unfortunately, Accutrack's survey tools do not capture student identification numbers for surveys s which means it was impossible to investigate, for example, if students in different majors or at different levels of academic preparation reported varying levels of satisfaction.

[5] See Y. Malini Reddy and Heidi Andre. 2010. "A Review of Rubric Use in Higher Education." *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 35(4): 435-448.

[6] In POSC 007, students' scored lower on the final paper and on three (out of six) items the decrease was significant. In POSC 119 and CPLT 002, there was at least one rubric item that showed a significant decrease and in GEO 001 change scores clustered very near zero. Across all rubric categories and classes significant improvements outnumber significant

that WSP activities do have a positive impact on student writing, but that the effect is small enough that it can be overwhelmed by circumstantial factors that affect particular classes (like the personality of particular instructors).

Additional analyses, in Table 6, explore the relationship between final exam rubric scores and participation in WSP workshops using regression techniques. Regression techniques model the relationship between two or more variables. Here we are interested in the relationship between the number of workshops a student attended and their final paper grade, under the assumption that more participation in WSP activities would lead to higher grades. Other variables that might be related to both WSP participation and writing grades, like overall GPA, are also included in the regression models to account for the possibility that these characteristics might affect both student writing and workshop attendance. Because student grades on the final paper are ordered categories (A+, A, A-, etc) instead of a continuous set of values, ordered logistic regression is the most appropriate technique.

Model 1 includes variables for the number of WSP workshop and midterm grades and shows that both have a positive and significant relationship with final paper grades. Substantively, this means that those students who scored better on the mid-term paper scored better on the final paper, suggesting students with better writing skills did better on both writing assignments. It also means that students who participated in more workshops scored higher on the final paper. This basic conclusion about WSP activities holds across all models.

Models 2 through 4 control for student characteristics and, interestingly, cumulative UCR GPA, mid-term paper grade, and number of workshops have a significant impact on the final paper grade. This suggests that students with higher grades in general tend to earn higher grades on final papers. While this is not unexpected, the significant positive effect of WSP workshop attendance remains, thus suggesting that the relationship between workshop attendance and final paper grades is important even when controlling for students' cumulative UCR GPA. Substantively similar results are obtained when the outcome variable in regression is the change between mid-term writing assignment and end of quarter writing assignment.

What we see from rubric data, then, is that scores tend to improve from midterm to final. Also, final scores tend to be higher for those students who had higher mid-term grades. In terms of programmatic impact, students who attended more workshops scored higher on the final paper, even after controlling for midterm paper grades and a number of student characteristics. At the same time, it is important to remember that the courses here are not a random selection of courses and that programmatic effects for participants were not compared to a similar control group of non-participants (e.g., rubrics applied to the same course without WSP workshops); the latter would provide a more robust evaluation of the program.

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declines by almost two-to-one (17 to 9) and all positive changes outnumber all negative changes also by two-to-one (28 to 14).

Support Faculty who Make Demanding Writing Assignments (G4) and Encourage Instructors to Raise Expectations (G5)

Faculty and staff who worked with the WSP in AY13-14 were surveyed about a number of issues related to the WSP's goals.[7] While this survey had a small total number of respondents (17), most of these respondents (11) were faculty and this represents about half (48%) of all faculty that worked with the WSP in AY13-14. For the multiple choice items, Table 7 shows simple counts of responses in each category. Importantly, about two thirds of respondents (11 out of 17) indicated they had raised their expectations of student writing as a result of working with the WSP. In terms of student writing and instructor expectations, most respondents indicated student writing improved and that organization was the area most improved. In terms of support, most instructors indicated that working with the WSP helped in clarifying assignments. Many instructors also indicated that the use of grading rubrics helped coordinate expectations among professor and TA(s) and that they would likely use a rubric again in the future. Most respondents also indicated that what students learned should transfer to other writing assignments; while a few were unsure, none gave a negative response to this item. It is particularly noteworthy all respondents indicated they would be willing to work with the WSP again in the future.

The survey also contained two free response items asking about the most and least helpful aspects of working with the WSP. These were generally articulate and are included, edited only for anonymity, in Table 8. Instructors thought the WSP did a good job of addressing quality of student writing, providing extra attention to writing and generally supporting the teaching process. Most instructors indicated that working with the WSP was a pleasant and productive experience. Indeed, the most common theme for improvements to the WSP was more numerous or extensive workshops.

Transfer of Writing Skills (G6)

Although the transfer of writing skill is an important goal of the WSP program, no convincing way to measure it could be included here. The main issue is that after taking a WSP course, students may move on to any number of other courses, which may not have a significant writing component. The problem, then, is the identification of what could be evaluated and a lack of resources to assess a large number of writing samples from students in courses not connected to the WSP.

Discussion

The range of services offered and customization of support for individual courses makes it difficult to construct a single narrative about the relative success of the WSP. That said, there is at least some evidence of success in the terms of most of the WSP's goals:

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[7] The WSP worked with faculty and staff in the University Honors Program to support students writing theses as well as staff in Athletics to support student athletes.

G1) The way the WSP has "embedded" their activities in a number of classes is a new model of writing support.

G2) The WSP has served over two-thousand students, through workshop and standalone services offered at the ARC, although students did not self-report highly positive experiences.

G3) There is evidence that students in WSP supported courses did improve writing from mid-term to final assignments. There is also evidence that those students who attended more workshops saw more improvement in their final paper grades.

G4) Faculty, in general, indicated that they found collaboration with the WSP productive.

G5) Most faculty indicated that they would raise their expectations for student writing after working with the WSP.

It was not possible to evaluate the extent to which the skills the WSP is teaching are transferring on to other courses (G6).

There are important limitations in the data used here. First, the total set of classes with which the WSP worked was selected by WSP staff and these classes are clearly concentrated in CHASS; their instructors may not be representative of all faculty on campus. Second, the even smaller subset of classes analyzed here provided the most complete data. Third, much the same point about non-representative sampling can be made about the faculty and student participants in both surveys. Further, a more robust evaluation would compare outcomes for the WSP supported courses (experimental group) to non-WSP supported courses (control group), in order to verify that higher final paper grades were not an artifact of students' natural improvement or motivation to improve their writing during the course of an academic quarter.

One way to summarize these findings and the limitations of this evaluation is that the WSP has been successful in improving writing in CHASS courses with high levels of workshop support, but that there is also reason for caution about the extent to which this would generalize to new courses and different kinds of services.

Table 1: All WSP Services Spring 2013 to Fall 2014, courses included here in bold

Spring 2013		
	Enrollment	Workshops
POSC 106: Environmental Political Thought	**80**	**6**
POSC 119: Political Thinkers in Depth	**83**	**4**
ENSC 191: Professional Development Seminar	23	-
Honors Thesis support, in ARC		
General Office Hours, in ARC		
Summer 2013		
BUS 100: Management Communication	**60**	**2**
BUS 107: Organizational Behavior	**100**	**2**
BUS 111: Services Marketing	**52**	**2**
POSC 007: Introduction to Political Theory	**24**	**3**
POSC 108: Financial Evaluation and Managerial Analysis	**16**	**2**
POSC 112 : Modern Political Theory	**28**	**2**
POSC 182: Politics and Economic Policy	**51**	**2**
Intro to University Life	74	-
Honors Thesis support, in ARC		
General Office Hours, in ARC		
Fall 2013		
GEO 001: The Earth's Crust and Interior	107	3
ENSC 191: Professional Development Seminar	30	-
History 113: Slavery and the Old South	85	-
Honors 001: Step-by-Step to College Success for Freshmen	200	-
CHASS Learning Community: Media and Choice	75	-
CHASS Learning Community: Science Fiction	75	-
CHASS Learning Community: Violence	75	-
Honors Thesis support, in ARC		
General Office Hours, in ARC		
Winter 2014		
AHS 008: Modern Western Visual Culture	**75**	**2**
CPLT 002: Reading World Literature	**58**	**2**
ENGL121T: Postcolonial Literatures of Asia and Africa, and the Caribbean	**25**	**2**
WMST 030: Violence Against Women	**99**	**3**
BUS 100W: Management Writing and Communication	219	-
CHASS Learning Community: Media and Choice	73	-
CHASS Learning Community: Science Fiction	70	-
CHASS Learning Community : Violence	64	-
Honors Thesis Support, in ARC		
Athletics, in ARC		
General Office Hours, in ARC		

Table 1, Continued: WSP Services Spring 2013 to Fall 2014 , courses included here in bold

Spring 2014		
BSWT 003: Basic Writing for Second Language Students	**85**	**3**
HIST 010: World History to 1500	**499**	**2**
THEA 021: Culture Clash: Studies in Latino Theatre and Film	**21**	**3**
WMST 010: Women and Culture	**41**	**2**
HIST 197: Research for Undergraduates	102	-
CPLT 181: Existentialism in Literature, Film and Culture	17	-
CHASS Learning Community : Media and Choice	70	-
CHASS Learning Community : Science Fiction	68	-
CHASS Learning Community : Violence	63	-
Honors Thesis Support, in ARC		
Athletics, in ARC		
General Office Hours, in ARC		

Table 2: Number of Workshops Attended by Students in WSP Supported Courses

Number of Workshops Attended[8]	%	N
0	20.95	185
1	24.12	213
2	29.67	262
3	21.29	188
4	3.74	33
5	0.23	2

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[8] This table does not include missing values (N=516). Students with missing data on the original WSP worksheets are part of these missing values.

Table 3: Demographics Characteristics of Students in WSP in Supported Courses and Visiting the ARC, All Students Enrolled Thrid Week of Winter 2014 as Comparison

	WSP at ARC		WSP Course		All UCR	
Academic Chars	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)	N
High School GPA	3.59 0.34	1612	3.52 0.33	1190	3.56 0.34	15913
SAT Verbal	505.59 85.87	1589	509.81 82.30	1192	520.95 81.88	15258
SAT Math	542.52 95.04	1589	543.36 94.02	1192	558.25 92.93	15258
SAT Writing	514.52 83.21	1581	516.97 80.04	1180	527.04 79.97	15199
Cumulative GPA	2.98 0.57	1261	2.81 0.52	807	2.86 0.59	17965
Demographics	%	N	%	N	%	N
Female	63.40	1152	56.49	783	51.51	9219
Male	36.60	665	43.51	603	48.49	8678
Hispanic	41.62	760	40.32	560	35.84	6438
Asian	36.47	666	38.88	540	40.86	7341
Caucasian	11.34	207	11.52	160	14.10	2533
African American	7.67	140	6.55	91	6.60	1185
Native American	0.33	6	0.29	4	0.40	72
Unknown/Other	2.57	47	2.45	34	2.20	396
Freshmen	42.54	776	13.19	183	21.06	3784
Sophomore	16.28	297	25.02	347	21.01	3774
Junior	14.64	267	29.63	411	25.25	4537
Senior	26.54	484	32.16	446	32.62	5860
BCoE	7.39	135	5.62	78	12.56	2256
CNAS	17.58	321	15.33	213	25.06	4502
CHASS	68.73	1255	69.55	966	56.32	10117
SoBA	6.30	115	9.50	132	6.07	1090
First Generation	59.17	1055	58.44	807	56.18	10092
Not First Gen	40.83	728	41.56	574	43.82	7873
Low Income	47.62	849	44.90	620	41.83	7514
Not Low Income	52.38	934	55.10	761	58.17	10451
Honors	13.09	239	2.22	31	3.43	616
Not Honors	86.91	1587	97.78	1366	96.57	17349

Table 4: Survey Responses of Students who used WSP Services in the ARC, Winter and Spring 2014

		Overall	WSP Office Hours	WSP Workshops	CHASS Connect	Undergrad Revision	Undergrad. Revision: ENGL 1	All Other
(Strongly disagree = 1 ; Strongly agree = 5)								
I learned something about the writing process that will help me with my essays	mean	3.53	3.87	3.32	3.28	3.88	4.12	3.51
	(sd)	1.33	1.08	1.43	1.41	1.17	0.84	1.35
	N	1647	228	1419	388	168	84	1091
I will be able to apply the lessons I learned in my workshop to essays in my other courses	mean	3.46	3.86	3.23	3.20	3.83	4.12	3.45
	(sd)	1.34	1.05	1.44	1.36	1.15	0.84	1.37
	N	1636	221	1415	387	162	79	1087
I will be able to write a better outline or brainstorm	mean	3.47	3.81	3.26	3.17	3.79	4.12	3.46
	(sd)	1.31	1.04	1.42	1.34	1.13	0.84	1.35
	N	1619	215	1404	381	156	75	1082
I will be able to write a better thesis statement	mean	3.46	3.95	3.18	3.11	4.00	4.12	3.43
	(sd)	1.31	0.95	1.41	1.33	0.94	0.84	1.35
	N	1606	216	1390	365	156	75	1085
I will be able to write better body paragraphs	mean	3.48	3.90	3.24	3.11	4.06	4.29	3.45
	(sd)	1.33	1.05	1.42	1.33	0.93	0.76	1.38
	N	1613	220	1393	371	161	80	1081

Table 5: Student Use of WSP Services in the ARC

Visits Per[9] Student	Mean (SD)	Unique Students	Total Sign-Ins
Overall	3.62 2.85	1826	4312
Summer 2013	2.32 1.46	411	650
Fall 2013	3.54 2.48	675	1292
Winter 2014	4.30 2.95	498	985
Spring 2014	3.83 3.33	697	1385

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[9] The overall unique sign-in figure in Table 5 only counts students once for any number of visits between summer 2013 and spring 2014 while the figures for each quarter only count students once within each quarter (and would count the same student a again the next quarter if they returned).

Table 6: Midterm and End of Term Rubric Scores

	Midterm Score		Final Score	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N
Thesis **	3.43 1.17	397	3.54 1.07	397
Organization **	3.46 1.09	341	3.72 1.07	341
Content **	3.40 1.10	293	3.52 1.20	293
Focus **	3.15 1.06	267	3.47 1.21	267
Style **	3.30 0.93	210	3.51 0.80	210
Grammar	3.76 1.02	185	3.81 1.19	185
Form **	3.53 1.11	176	4.04 0.90	176
Paragraph **	3.07 0.71	164	3.39 0.71	164
Citation **	4.02 1.34	130	4.43 1.21	130
Critical **	3.58 0.81	74	4.03 0.64	74

Significant differences ($p < 0.05$) from mid-term to final marked with **

Table 6: Regression Models Predicting Final Writing Assignment Grades

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
WSP Workshops	0.27 **	0.38 **	0.40 **	0.33 **
	0.10	0.11	0.11	0.12
Midterm Grade	1.37 **	1.25 **	1.24 **	1.30 **
	0.14	0.17	0.17	0.17
High School GPA		0.52	0.58	0.73
		0.40	0.41	0.41
SAT Verbal		0.01	0.01	0.01
		0.01	0.01	0.01
Cumulative GPA		1.05 **	1.09 **	1.05 **
		0.30	0.31	0.31
Low Income			-0.10	-0.12
			0.28	0.29
First Generation			-0.09	-0.02
			0.28	0.29
Female				0.24
				0.27
Class Level (Fresh.=1 ; Senior=4)				0.36*
				0.17
N	263	213	205	205
Pseudo R-Squared	0.10	0.12	0.13	0.13

Coefficients significant different from zero ($p < 0.05$) marked with **

Table 7: WSP Instructor Survey Responses

	Instructor	Program Partner	Teaching Assistant
What was your role when you worked with the WSP?	11	4	2

	Once	Twice	Three +
How many times, or in how many courses, did you work with the WSP?	7	4	6

	Very Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very Positive
How would you characterize your experience with WSP staff?	0	0	1	3	13
How would you characterize your experience with the availability of workshops?	0	0	1	5	11

	Got significantly worse	Got worse	Neither improved nor got worse	Improved	Significantly improved
Did student writing improve over the course of the quarter you worked with the WSP?	0	0	3	6	8

	Did not use the WSP in this way	No	Yes
Did the WSP help in planning assignments?	7	5	5
Did the WSP help in clarifying expectations around papers or other large writing assignments?	4	2	11
Did the rubric help coordinate grading between professor(s) and TA(s) and/or among TAs?	8	2	7
Would you use a writing rubric (either the one generated by the WSP or a new one) in a future class?	3	2	12

	No	Yes
Would you use WSP services again?	0	17

Table 8, Continued: WSP Instructor Survey Responses

	Brainstorming and generating ideas	Organization	Spelling and grammar
In what areas or skills do you think your students gained the most in terms of their writing?	3	7	0
In what areas were students still lacking after working with the WSP?	1	2	8
	Not sure	**No**	**Yes**
Do you think the lessons you learned working in the writing supported course will transfer to other classes you teach in the future?	4	0	13
Do you think the lessons your students learned will transfer to other courses in their program or major?	2	0	15
Do you think the lessons your students learned will transfer to other courses at UCR in general?	2	0	15
		No	**Yes**
Did you raise your expectations in terms of student writing due to working with the WSP?		6	11

Table 8, Continued: WSP Instructor Survey Responses

Instructor Answers to What was Most Helpful about WSP
I already have high expectations for student writing and think that the low quality of student writing is one of the most serious problems facing our students. I appreciate WSP support for my students as one additional measure of addressing this issue.
It really worked! Simply put, students learned to write better.
I appreciated the workshops that were set up, even though not many students attended. I already have my own rubrics, which I prefer.
It is useful to be able to refer students who need it for additional help.
the desire he showed in helping our student/athletes to be better writers
I really valued my experiences with the WSP! The staff members were aware of my deadlines and were amazing about getting in touch with me before and during the class when they realized a deadline was approaching. They didn't wait for me to call, but gently reminded me that they would need to schedule a workshop soon if they were going to be of use. This meant that their staff did not feel like another form of teaching assistant for me to expend energy in managing and directing their time, but rather a real basis for support. I will definitely feel more confident assigning challenging writing assignments in all of my courses, knowing that WSP could offer this kind of support. I believe they are playing an important role in raising the quality of instruction that is provided at UCR and in assisting undergraduates in becoming excellent scholars and writers.
Fantastic resource and asset during the course; gave students much-needed writing support, enabling clarity of purpose and supple expression of analytic work in student writing. Would definitely work with WSP again.
I really, really enjoyed working with [WSP staff] I think [they] made me improve as an instructor and I was most impressed with the grading rubric [. . .] generated for the course. I would love to use the WSP in the future and highly recommend it to colleagues and students.
It was great to be able to talk with [WSP staff] about the content of the course as well as about the students' writing. I also took note of the fact that I received all of the midterm papers on or around the deadline. Usually there are more laggards. I think the extra attention that the students received from Tim made them feel more motivated and more connected with the course. [The staff] was very good at pinpointing where the students' problems lay, which was helpful and time-saving.
Working with [WSP staff] was a joy. He was very accommodating with regard to scheduling and he worked with my discussion leaders to develop consistency in grading using rubrics he designed with me. He came to class 4 times to present mini-lectures to the students.

Table 9, Continued: WSP Instructor Survey Responses

Instructor Answers to What was Least Helpful about WSP

I use holistic rubrics for grading and the WSP uses itemized rubrics. Their rubric is not a great fit for how I think about or assess writing, and it meant that I had to grade each essay effectively twice.

It may be beneficial to make WSP staff more visible and integral to the class so students might be more likely to think of them as part of the course and take advantage of WSP resources. In retrospect I could have invited WSP staff to my sections early on.

This is a tough one to answer. I cannot think of any downsides. It seems like the next best thing to having a TA to have a WSP. In retrospect Tim and I agree that a third round of workshops would have been a good idea. I would also like to comment that I did not expect the students' writing to improve between the midterm and final papers because final papers are usually written when students are exhausted and rushed. They are usually worse than the midterm papers. I was very impressed by how good the midterm papers were and attribute that to Tim's workshops.

In the end I don't think it helped much. All the real work -- commenting on student papers -- fell on the TA. I think this program could be very useful, but it needs to be rethought. I think the program is pitched too low. And I'm sorry, but UCR is always trying to do writing support on the cheap, and it doesn't work.   STUDENTS NEED DETAILED FEEDBACK on written assignments, and then they need to do a MANDATORY REVISION. Workshops, group work, huge comp classes, etc, aren't going to accomplish much. I feel like students get more substantial feedback in their writing in my intro level lecture class -- from their TA -- than from their comp classes.

Appendix 1: Sample Rubric

	Missing 0	Needs Vast Improve-ment 1	Needs Improve-ment 2	Satisfactory 3	Good 4	Excellent 5
Thesis: The essay contains an overarching context, subject, claim						
Focus: The essay addresses the prompt						
Content: The essay engages with course concepts						
Organization and cohesiveness: The essay lays out a reasoned response. Each paragraph flows logically from the previous one						
Paragraphs: Each paragraph is coherently organized, with a clear topic sentence, and sentences that follow logically one from the next						
Style and Editing: Proper style, grammar, and punctuation shows that the essay has gone through revision						
Form: The essay incorporates citations and source materials effectively.						

Appendix 2: Course-Specific Midterm to Final Comparisons, Significant t-test marked with **

Table 9: Spring 2013, POSC 106				
	Midterm Score		Final Score	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N
Thesis **	2.96 0.94	74	3.63 0.75	74
Focus **	2.91 0.94	74	4.03 0.89	74
Content	3.81 0.61	74	3.82 0.75	74
Organization **	2.96 0.77	74	3.78 0.60	74
Paragraph **	2.95 0.74	74	3.74 0.68	74
Style **	2.99 0.80	74	3.81 0.49	74
Form **	3.19 0.72	74	3.88 0.64	74

Table 10: Spring 2013, POSC 119

	Midterm Score		Final Score	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N
Thesis **	4.28 0.69	74	4.09 0.74	74
Organization **	3.91 0.98	74	4.36 0.67	74
Content **	3.84 0.86	74	4.27 0.78	74
Critical **	3.58 0.81	74	4.03 0.64	74
Grammar **	3.95 0.76	74	3.64 1.12	74
Citation **	4.26 0.78	74	4.88 0.37	74

Table 11: Summer 2013, POSC 007

	Midterm Score		Final Score	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N
Thesis **	4.33 0.94	12	2.75 1.42	12
Organization	4.54 0.86	12	4.50 0.30	12
Content **	4.04 0.69	12	3.29 1.50	12
Focus **	4.08 0.60	12	2.79 1.03	12
Grammar	4.29 0.69	12	4.08 1.00	12
Citation	4.46 0.78	12	4.08 1.06	12

Table 12: Summer 2013, POSC 108

	Midterm Score		Final Score	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N
Thesis	3.19 1.76	16	3.59 1.51	16
Organization	3.31 1.78	16	3.52 1.66	16
Content **	3.19 1.64	16	4.30 1.29	16
Focus	3.00 1.75	16	3.59 1.36	16
Grammar	3.00 1.67	16	3.75 1.44	16
Citation **	3.19 1.76	16	4.06 1.41	16

Table 13: Summer 2013, POSC 112

	Midterm Score		Final Score	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N
Thesis	3.68 1.25	28	3.59 1.57	28
Organization	4.27 1.08	28	4.11 1.74	28
Content **	4.05 1.18	28	3.43 1.64	28
Focus	3.50 1.25	28	3.46 1.68	28
Grammar	3.46 1.25	28	3.21 1.66	28
Citation	3.68 2.04	28	3.59 1.92	28

Table 14: Summer 2013, POSC 182

	Midterm Score		Final Score	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N
Thesis **	2.94 1.26	47	3.70 1.28	47
Focus **	3.64 1.05	47	4.04 1.06	47
Organization	3.62 1.17	47	3.83 1.07	47
Comparison	3.98 0.92	47	3.81 1.01	47
Style	4.17 1.01	47	3.89 1.18	47
Form	3.47 1.47	47	3.85 1.12	47

Table 15: Fall 2013, GEO 001

	Midterm Score		Final Score	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N
Thesis	2.84 0.86	91	2.85 0.83	91
Focus	2.88 0.80	90	2.79 0.95	90
Organization	3.06 0.80	90	2.90 0.74	90
Paragraph	3.18 0.66	90	3.10 0.58	90
Style	3.09 0.68	89	3.06 0.46	89
Content	2.43 0.82	89	2.55 0.90	89

Table 16: Winter 2014, AHS 008

	Midterm Score		Final Score	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N
Reading **	3.05 0.87	63	3.48 0.50	63
Writing	3.19 0.67	63	3.24 0.80	63
Analysis	3.54 0.59	63	3.60 0.55	63

Table 17: Winter 2014, CPLT 002

	Midterm Score		Final Score	
	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N	Mean (Std. Dev.)	N
Analysis	3.84 1.08	55	4.09 0.97	55
Thesis	4.04 1.05	55	3.82 0.77	55
Grammar **	3.76 0.88	55	4.29 0.69	55
Form **	4.05 1.01	55	4.42 0.88	55