

Graduate Writing Center (GWC)– Questions and Answers

Q: What does a “Yes” vote for the GWC referendum mean at Forum on Wednesday, March 8th, 2006?

A: If 15 Forum members vote “Yes”, the GWC referendum will be placed on the GSA ballot. The referendum would only pass if a majority of voting graduate students voted in favor of the referendum in the general election.

Q: I think the GWC is an excellent idea, but I don’t think that graduate students should have to pay for it. Why should we pay for it?

A: The short answer is that no one else will pay for a GWC any time soon. Funding sources have been shrinking for years. Additionally, it is exceptionally difficult to acquire funding for a new service on campus since it’s hard for the funding entities to recognize how vital the service is without seeing it in action. The purpose of the referendum is to provide start-up funds and a base level of service for the GWC. The new full-time staff of the GWC would lead the effort to secure additional funds from a variety of funding sources. Eventually, graduate students should be paying for only a fraction of the GWC. Without passing a referendum, it’s reasonable to predict that GSA would have to work very hard for five to ten years before receiving external funding to start the GWC. If the referendum passes, other campus units (like Graduate Division) have indicated that they would help us get more funding very quickly.

Q: Who would staff the GWC?

A: The GWC referendum would fund a full-time professional GWC director develop and implement the workshops, train and oversee the graduate student writing tutors, cultivate partnerships with departments, collaborate with other university entities to broaden the range of workshops offered by the center and lead the effort to acquire additional funding. The GWC referendum would also fund three half-time graduate students working throughout the academic year who would provide drop-in and appointment-based writing assistance. The GWC referendum would also provide some funding for workshops.

Q: Aren’t our advisors and mentors the best people to help us with our academic and professional writing?

A: Yes! Your advisors and mentors will always be the best people to help you with the content of writing and presentations. The Graduate Writing Center is not intended to take the place of your advisor or mentor, but rather will provide you with help in structuring your content, and in presenting your ideas clearly (in writing and in presentations). The GWC will also provide graduate students with the tools they need to navigate the publishing and grant writing process, and will emphasize not only getting started with these processes, but also seeing all types of projects through to completion.

Q: How can someone who doesn’t know anything about my field help me with my project?

A: No matter what field you are in, good writing is good writing, and poorly presented findings can cost you grant opportunities, publications, and jobs. The issues that hold people back from successfully submitting grant proposals and articles, finishing dissertations, and making effective presentations tend to be the same no matter what the field. An experienced writing specialist can help you learn to improve any type of academic writing and presentation, and will be able to address the issues that might be holding you back. Of course, area specialists will be needed for workshops that address certain topics. The GWC director will coordinate the participation of these specialists, and there will be funds in the budget to pay for special presenters when necessary.

Q: How will the Graduate Writing Center be evaluated?

A: If funding is approved, we will immediately begin to assemble a graduate-student majority oversight committee that will include students from all parts of campus with a diversity of backgrounds and academic/professional goals, as well as representatives from our collaborators: the faculty, Graduate Division, and Student Affairs. One of the first tasks of the GWC director and oversight committee will be to develop a strategic plan that include a mission, vision, values, strategic

goals, and a means of assessing the success of the GWC in meeting its goals. The strategic plan and assessment results will be presented to Forum on a regular basis.

Q: How can we be sure that the Graduate Writing Center is offering services that are of value to all of the campus community?

A: The GWC director will work with schools/departments and graduate councils to ensure that the needs of the various campus constituencies are being met, and will develop new workshops and services as needs arise. Every student visiting the GWC will fill out an intake form, and records will be kept that allow for an assessment of who is using the center and attending its workshops. The mission of the GWC will be to serve all graduate students on campus. If it does not meet that need, the graduate student-majority oversight committee will use this assessment data to evaluate why and make necessary changes.

Q: Could there be costs savings by combining with the undergraduate writing services?

A: Undergraduate writing services rely on undergraduate tutors, and do not offer the specialized workshops that serve the academic writing needs of graduate students. The goal of the GWC is not only to provide basic tutoring assistance (offered by trained, paid graduate students), but also to address the academic writing needs of graduate students. Because there is very little overhead associated with the establishment of the GWC, there would be very little cost savings involved in space sharing. A graduate-only writing center will be much more responsive to graduate student needs.

Q: I don't think people from my school will use the GWC. Why should we pay for it?

A: There are a few schools on campus that have excellent student services that meet most of their graduate students needs, but the vast majority of graduate students on campus have no access to a school- or department-based resource to help with academic and professional writing and presenting. The GWC's goal is to be of value to all graduate and professional school students on campus, and will work with any school or council to develop workshops or services to fill unmet needs.