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Feel free to send queries, ideas, and proposals to us at southerndiscoursejournal@gmail.com.

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Back to the Center

Deep Run High School

—Melissa Daniels and Mia Tambellini

Ding. Ding. Ding. The bell rings. Teens swarm the hallways. Passing under a banner that reads: “Wildcat Writing Center Deep Run High School Where Wildcats Write Right,” consultants scurry into the classroom. One rolls out the painted-blue table and opens her laptop to the list of appointment sign-ups. Others find seats at one of the eight sections of rectangular tables. Some are quickly eating a few French fries, sipping water, or opening a bag of pretzels. Soon, a small line of students forms behind the rolling table, as the greeter checks them in for their appointments. Chatter fills the room: friendly greetings, essay read-alouds, curious inquiries. Thirty minutes later, more students enter and wait patiently to check in as the first consultations end and new ones begin. It’s a Tuesday or Wednesday during One Lunch – an hour-long lunch period when students can eat, connect with friends, attend club meetings, meet with teachers – and visit the Writing Center!

Our High School

Deep Run High School is in Henrico County, a suburb of Richmond, Virginia. It is home to more than 1,900 high school students and 111 teachers. Most students live in the district, but some who have been accepted into our high school’s Center for Information Technology, a specialty center for students interested in learning the fundamentals of technology, commute from other parts of the county. In 2018, the U.S. Department of Education named Deep Run High School an exemplary, high-performing National Blue Ribbon School. Current U.S. News & World Report Best High Schools Rankings lists Deep Run as 1st in Henrico County, 12th in Virginia, and 488th in the U.S.

We are the only Henrico County School with an hour-long lunch period each day when the whole school engages in social, extracurricular, co-curricular, and academic pursuits. Our Writing Center is open two days per week during this time.

Our Writing Center

The Deep Run Writing Center, in its current iteration, began in 2018. In fall 2021, Deep Run High School became an institutional member of the Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA). Open one or two hours each week, our Writing Center has provided nearly 1,300 consultations since Fall 2018. Our primary method of consultation has been in-person, but due to the pandemic, our Writing Center did successfully provide about 220 virtual consultations during the 2020-2021 school year.

Our staff has included between 12 and 18 trained student consultants each school year. These students earn community service hours for their work. Our consultant selection process begins in the winter of the prior school year with an interest meeting for rising 11th and 12th grade students. Students then submit an application that requires them to document their knowledge of writing and peer tutoring, skills and attributes, and availability and willingness to commit. Applicants also provide a writing sample. We invite the top applicants to interview with our current consultants. Using the application, interview, and teacher feedback, we select our new consultants. This year's application process was the most competitive yet: we selected 12 of the 47 who applied.

After being selected, each new consultant is paired with a veteran consultant who serves as a mentor. New consultants shadow their mentor through the end of the school year. In the summer, we organize a training session where new consultants learn more about writing centers, hear from veterans, understand and practice our basic consultation process, and discuss Writing Center logistics. Training continues once school starts, leading to a "soft opening" with the sponsors' students coming for consultations before we officially open for all students. After our Writing Center opens, we have monthly staff meetings with a Professional Development (PD) component. Since 2018, we have also connected with college writing centers and participated in events like the SWCA Annual Conference and SWCA-VA Tutor Collaboration Day.

Currently, we serve as the teacher sponsors for our Writing Center. We are also the SWCA Secondary School Representatives, a role that involves connecting with other secondary school writing centers in the southeastern region of the United States to build a contact list, invite them to state and regional events, and share secondary school writing center needs with state representatives and board members.

Our Writing Center sponsors and staff participated in the SWCA's annual conference held virtually in February 2022. Two of our student consultants shared their experiences on the keynote panel, and our sponsors led a roundtable entitled "Responding to Logistical Challenges in the Writing Center." Our consultants particularly enjoyed participating in and winning the Goose Chase, the conference's application-based scavenger hunt that encouraged comradery with various team challenges. Building on our positive experience at this conference, five of our consultants led a roundtable entitled "Sustaining a Writing Center: Supporting Consultants and Consultees" at the virtual SWCA-Virginia Tutor Collaboration Day this fall.

Our Goals and Achievements

Our goals are three-fold: equip student consultants with writing knowledge and relational skills, support teachers' writing instruction by providing one-on-one consultations for their students, and develop confidence in student writers by affirming their strengths and facilitating their growth.

We are proud of the opportunities our Writing Center affords our consultants to undergo mentoring and shadowing, training, and ongoing PD. Last school year we created a "greeter" role that rotates among consultants. The greeter welcomes students to their appointments and assists them to an available consultant.

Just this year, we have also offered leadership roles. These roles have encouraged investment in our Writing Center and helped distribute many of the tasks necessary to keep our Writing Center running. Our Webmasters work to revitalize our website. Our Writing Center Manager creates a greeter schedule and provides necessary signage and resources in our Writing Center. Advertising Coordinators produce a video for morning announcements, fliers with a sign-up QR code, t-shirts,

Instagram posts, and materials for our campus display case. School Relations Liaisons reach out to faculty to share our Writing Center's offerings and look for other ways we can support their instruction. Our Professional Development Coordinator plans monthly PD for our Writing Center staff and leads staff to present at other PD events like SWCA-VA's Tutor Collaboration Day 2022.

Our Writing Center also includes annual celebrations and traditions, such as a senior send-off where underclass consultants honor each graduating consultant with a reflection on their contributions to the Writing Center, and all consultants sign a student-designed ceiling tile that remains in our Writing Center permanently.

To support our teachers, we gather specifics on their writing and presentation assignments and expectations that we share with our consultants. We have enjoyed partnerships with science, Language Instruction Educational Program, exceptional education, journalism, history, English, Advanced Placement (AP) Capstone, and Center for Information Technology Capstone teachers. Our Writing Center has been a component of our high school's Literacy Plan and Instructional Planning Committee.

Making sure our consultants are equipped and teachers are supported, undergirds our third, and most important, goal to develop confident student writers. We have worked to make our Writing Center more accessible by advertising on our morning announcements, creating and sustaining an Instagram account, and posting fliers with sign-up QR codes for students to make appointments. Since we are available at lunchtime, most students, even those with work, family, and extracurricular commitments, can schedule an appointment. Our greeters and consultants make student writers feel welcome and comfortable. Student writers build trust with consultants and often ask to work with the same consultant again. We believe that our casual, but focused environment and consistent location and hours create a known space that students want to visit. Our survey results indicate that nearly all student writers feel more confident about their writing after a consultation than they did beforehand.

Our Hopes

While Deep Run is known for rigorous academic and a high number of Advanced Placement courses, we strive to be available for students at all levels. In addition to the pre-established teacher partnerships, we are working with the Exceptional Education Department to reach writers with Individualized Education Plans. Case managers, who support these students, are encouraging those who may be reluctant to share their writing or who may need assistance to make and keep their appointments. We are also working on new ways to support English Language Learners in our Writing Center. Our hope is that the Writing Center is accessible to all students and that they will feel internally motivated to keep returning.

In addition, we are focusing on consultant training and student writer consultations across all content areas, beyond the typical essay for English class. We have also consulted with students about small group research presentations and hope to continue this work.

Other continuing projects include updating our website and strengthening our Writing Center's social media presence. We have long-term hopes of more collaborations with local college writing centers, helping to develop and support new writing centers at the district level and in the southeastern region, and eventually, applying for SWCA Center Acknowledgement and Recognition of Excellence (C.A.R.E.) Certification.

Our Words of Thanks

We are indebted to Lindsey Leeth, a former teacher sponsor who helped start Deep Run's first Writing Center after visiting writing centers at another Virginia high school and The University of Richmond, and Beth Berry, a former college writing center consultant herself, who sponsored the early Deep Run Writing Center, helped restart and sponsor the current Writing Center Spring 2018-Spring 2022, and served as a SWCA Secondary School Representative Fall 2021-Spring 2022.

We are grateful for the support of our Deep Run administrators, department leader, teachers, students, and community, which makes our

Writing Center possible. We appreciate the work our Writing Center does and anticipate continued meaningful work ahead.



Figure 1. Members of the 2021-2022 Deep Run Writing Center staff and teacher sponsors pausing for a photo while participating in the 2022 SWCA Virtual Conference.



Figure 2. The Writing Center banner that hangs above the door into the classroom that houses our Writing Center.

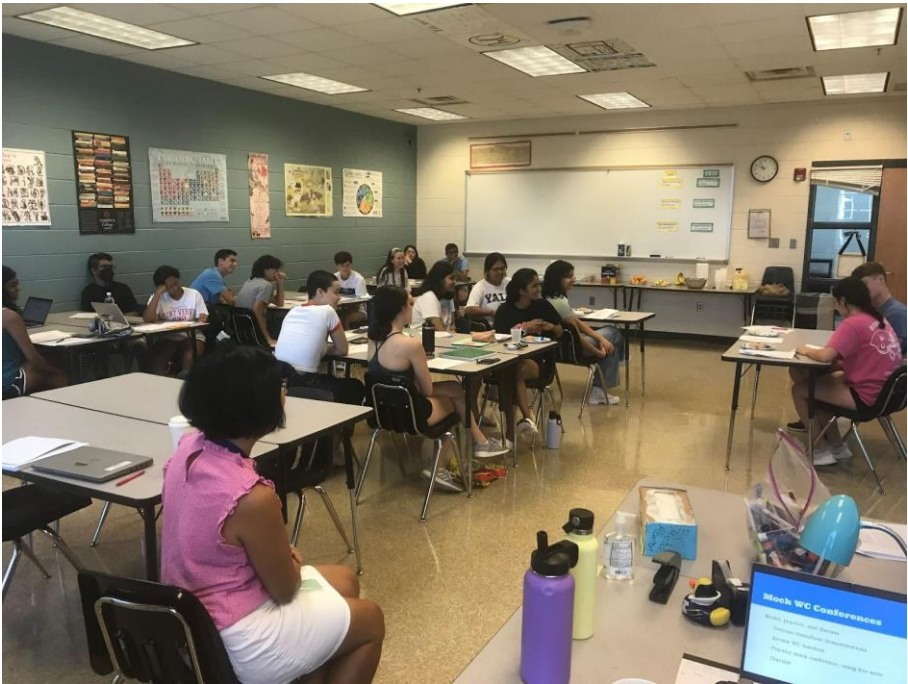


Figure 3. Deep Run Writing Center consultants watching two veteran consultants model mock consultations during our summer training session. This is the same classroom space that functions as our Writing Center.



Figure 4. 2022-2023 Writing Center teacher sponsors and staff smiling after completing their summer training session.

Contributor Bios

Melissa Daniels has been teaching English at Deep Run High School since 2015, earning her National Board Certification in 2017. She grew up in Richmond, Virginia and graduated from The College of William and Mary with a B.A. in English in 2008. She earned her M.A. in English from the Middlebury College Bread Loaf School of English in 2014. Melissa served as a writing center consultant in both college and graduate school. This is her fifth year co-sponsoring the Deep Run Writing Center. She enjoys working with her co-sponsor, Mia, the consultants, and members of the SWCA board.

Mia Tambellini has been teaching English at Deep Run High School since 2019. She grew up in Washington state and graduated from Western Washington University with a journalism degree. Her husband is a retired Navy pilot, and she has taught in Corpus Christi, TX, New Orleans, LA, Jacksonville, FL, and Goochland, VA. This is her first year co-sponsoring the Writing Center. She is enjoying working with the amazing group of consultants and being a part of the SWCA board.