

## The Write-In in Fresno State: A Writing and Research Collaboration

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California State University, Fresno—also known as Fresno State—is a public university and one of the 23 campuses within the California State University System. From writing to research to critical thinking, students have to learn and develop a variety of skills, and Fresno State librarians provide instructional services to assist students in acquiring these skills. However, with a limited budget and resources, it became evident that collaborating with different groups on campus would be necessary to effectively support students and their research needs. This paper describes an example of one such collaboration with the Writing Center at Fresno State through a program known as the “write-in.”

In Fall 2015, the librarians in research services and the instructors from the Writing Center (which is staffed by the first year writing program) wanted to strengthen the relationship between the Writing Center and the library. More and more classes are assigning research papers and a stronger relationship could be one way to support student success and to combat procrastination or writer’s block at Fresno State. The first year student success librarian, Raymond Pun, has had experience working with writing and tutoring centers at his previous job at New York University Shanghai (2013-2015) and shared with the Fresno State Writing Center staff his past activities designed to develop effective research and writing skills for students. One such activity is the “write-in,” an event where students can come to the library or any open space and work on their writing assignments. The purpose of this activity is to create an informal learning environment where students can work either collaboratively or individually and consult, if needed, with a writing tutor or a librarian. The write-in is typically hosted and organized by the writing center, however in this instance, the Fresno State library wanted to emphasize its’ research spaces and services for students during this period.

### The Fresno State Library’s Partnership with the Writing Center

As noted by Ferer (2012), libraries and university writing centers are frequent collaborators (e.g., training tutors, joint classes and workshops, sharing space) and have overlapping goals. In this instance, in order to ensure a successful partnership between the Fresno State Library and the Writing Center, the librarians and Writing Center staff took several steps in Fall 2015 to learn each other’s services. First, librarians were invited to tour the Writing Center and its space. They learned details such as that, contrary to our beliefs, the Writing Center does not “edit” papers but rather “writes” and “thinks” with the students through a series of dialogue. The tutors are trained to give thoughtful questions and responses for students to consider when they are brainstorming for their papers. Questions such as: *Who is the audience for this paper? What do you already know about this topic? What is it that you need to know? How would you find out more on this topic?* These prompts get students thinking about their writing and research process.

In a second visit, the Writing Center director invited the librarians to sit in a class for the writing tutors. The librarians, in the role of a tutor, had to do some reflective writing and sharing in the class. This practice was helpful for librarians to learn how the tutors were being trained and how their philosophy of the writing process is formed through this exercise.

In a reciprocal approach that helped our relationship continue to grow, the librarians invited the Writing Center director and the associate director to regularly attend our monthly meetings covering the first year information literacy program. A handful of librarians, FYE staff, and faculty who support first year students with an emphasis on information literacy get together once a month to discuss best practices and upcoming activities. This group, known as the “first year information literacy advisory group” (FYILAG), to assess current information literacy practices and it was during these discussions that we brainstormed the write-in program with the Writing Center director. The FYILAG was very helpful when it came time to promote this collaborative event because they were able to get the word out to the instructors in their departments.

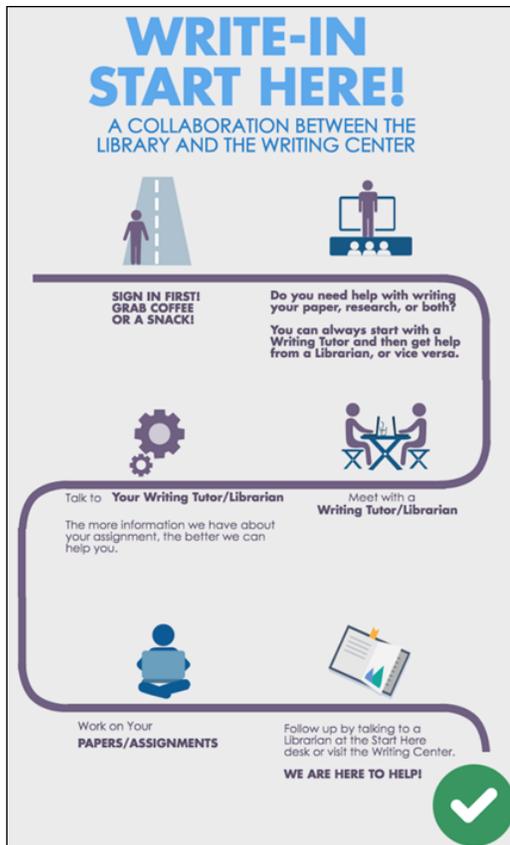
### Write-In: Assessing Fall 2015 and Spring 2016

In the beginning of the write-in planning stages, one of the biggest challenges was identifying an appropriate time to host this event. After many discussions amongst members of the FYILAG, it was agreed to have this event on the week before finals week to encourage students to start working on their research assignments. Another challenge was finding an appropriate space in the library. At Fresno State, on the second floor, there is a study space that could host the write-in program since it was large enough and is highly visible to students in the library. The FYILAG also agreed to not make this an “RSVP” event since it was anticipated that there would be many drop-ins by students floating in the library. Throughout the write-ins, there were two librarians and five writing tutors per hour and the library provided light refreshment such as cookies, coffee and tea.

The first write-in event at Fresno State was launched on December 3, 2015 from 4-7:30 pm. A key purpose of this event was to demonstrate to the students that the research and writing activities are recursive, with research occurring at different phases in the process: students identify a potential topic for their papers, discuss it with a writing tutor, search for sources for their papers with a librarian and question their writing and research materials. In the first hour, there were several students requesting research and writing help. The demand was so high that some writing tutors and librarians took on multiple students in a group discussion. This turned out to be an effective way to create a peer-learning environment where students can openly share about their research projects or assignments and get input from fellow students as well. The tutors also asked

reflection questions to get students to think more analytically and critically about their writing. This kind of conversation encouraged students to think about how their sources support or challenge the arguments that they were trying to make in the papers. In total, 17 students came to the event and, according to the sign-in sheet, most were first year students. This first attempt in creating the write-in event offered a lot of learning opportunities to improve in marketing and the user experience for future ones. For example, an infographic was designed after this session to explain to students how the write-in works. It was hung on a bulletin board for students to see.

**Figure 1:**  
Piktochart-created infographic flier created to show how the write-in works. While useful, upon reflection, this image can also send a mixed message since research and writing is recursive and not a linear process. However, the image was posted to explain to students what the event is about.



In Spring 2016, the write-in was launched again: March 14 and April 21, 2016 from 4-6 pm. These dates were selected to support midterm and finals weeks and to encourage students to plan ahead with their assignments. During the planning stages for these events, there were more fliers and handouts to boost the marketing efforts. There was also a discussion with the writing tutors to identify how to better support their needs during the event. For instance, when a student was done meeting with a writing tutor, is it necessary for the student to follow up with a librarian? In some cases, the student may want speak again with a librarian to learn how to access some of the online resources for their research papers.

On March 14, there were over 20 students who attended. Librarians were teaching information literacy skills to students working on a variety of research projects, and similar to a reference interview at the information desk, librarians discussed different kinds of sources and encouraged students to think about their information needs. It was another learning opportunity and growing success for this new collaboration. On April

20, the event attracted over 40 students. Finals week happens to be a great time to schedule these activities because most papers are due later that same week. In this event, the level of engagement between students and writing instructors were different compared to the past events: students were not seeking help with editing their papers but rather asking help to refine their research topics or find a specific source to support their claim. So while these write-in events were designed to support students in their various writing stages and it became clear that most students still start their papers the very last minute.

Throughout this session, the ACRL Framework for Information literacy was applied in action. Librarians encouraged students to think more critically about their sources in the context of scholarship and authority. Students had to refine and reformulate their own research questions, and think analytically about the searching process: consider the context of the sources and how to search for them strategically. In one example, a student wanted to write about human trafficking and knew very little about it or where to begin the research process. The librarian asked the student what he knew already, and the student mentioned that human trafficking involved kidnapping people but he mentioned that he wanted to know about the statistics, locations and the kinds of people that were being kidnapped. After this discussion, it became clearer that the student needed to use a reference database to find out the basic information on human trafficking and then formulate research questions around this information. The student eventually decided to focus on child trafficking in India and how the Indian government has been combatting child trafficking successfully and unsuccessfully.

Throughout the event, there were different levels of discussions going on. In some cases, students brainstormed on their topics with a writing tutor before speaking to a librarian. Other students would talk to a librarian and realize that they actually needed to talk to a writing tutor instead. The primary role of the librarian is to support their research needs, however, librarians can also serve as research conversation partners and cover a variety of topics and sources in an interdisciplinary matter. This event was another success that proved the importance of such collaboration to support student success in writing and research at Fresno State

## Conclusion

Overall, the write-in events were designed to promote research and writing services and demonstrate how these two activities are integrative to any research paper. The three write-ins described in this paper showed a momentum of increasing number of students requesting support from librarians and writing tutors. One of the most important steps for the library to consider creating such event is getting buy-in from the writing faculty and Writing Center. Building these partnerships can take time but they may flourish in ways that can truly bring new services to support student success as demonstrated in this example at Fresno State.

Academic librarians who are interested in creating similar events or activities, should consider the logistics of setting up

(Write-In...Continued from page 9)

the event in advance. From spacing to scheduling to marketing, academic librarians will need to manage these activities in order to support this kind of collaboration. During the actual event, if there are many students requesting help, it may be useful to group students together to create a peer-learning environment and to alleviate the traffic.

In future sessions, the library at Fresno State will continue to partner with the Writing Center to host these activities but will expand it in a number of ways. One approach is through

curriculum mapping: identifying course syllabi that require research or writing assignments in advance and informing the instructors about these events. The library will also encourage international students to attend the write-in since it can be a very helpful service for students who may not be familiar with U.S. academic writing (as shown by recent write-in events at institutions like [Bowdoin](#) and [Swarthmore](#)). Overall, the write-in event fostered new dialogue and opportunities for students, the library and the Writing Center at Fresno State. The write-in became a holistic service to students and allowed them to recognize how important the library and Writing Center can be for their academic needs.

(General Education...Continued from page 5)

## What's Next

Future plans for librarians include participating in the GE Program through teaching, supporting, and assessing the new program. Additionally, the Subcommittee on Assessment of General Education (SAGE), has begun a pilot project for academic years 2016-2018 that will assess three SLOs per semester to test the submission process and to evaluate each rubric's efficacy. For the IL SLO, twenty IL courses are being assessed during the 2016-2017 academic year.

The IL panel's experiences revealed areas for rubric improvement. The following changes may prevent confusion and lay the foundation for a smoother process:

- Add specifics relating to the quantity and quality of information literacy practice in courses. For example, some proposals contained small, superficial, or isolated exercises that did meet most criteria, but were not challenging or integrated into larger projects.
- Clarify that information literacy does not mean being literate about the content of the course. Instead, it requires a deep understanding of how information to support and enhance course content is found, evaluated, and used.
- Rewrite the IL rubric reflecting the new ACRL Framework for Information Literacy. While the Framework was filed in January 2015, URI's General Education work was already well underway and many faculty were familiar with our 2013 rubric.

In closing, it is clear that information literacy at the University of Rhode Island is firmly integrated in the General Education Program. IL stands equally with STEM, Social Science, Arts & Design, Humanities, Writing, Communication, Diversity and Inclusion, and Civic Responsibility.

However, in retrospect, this process highlighted deep and important differences in how subject faculty and librarians see IL, differences that might not have surfaced if the process of making the elements of IL explicit hadn't taken place. Librarians see IL as entwined with the subject content, while faculty still often see it as a tangential subset of their course content. While understanding the vocabulary of a discipline can be an element of IL, it isn't in itself IL. Finally, the approval process

opened new dialogues between faculty—who were eager but inexperienced in the area—and our experienced practitioners. It is our hope that in the future, students in an introductory course would no longer arrive at the Library looking for an article without an understanding of the greater context of the task; instead, they would be primed to conduct their searches more deliberately, think more deeply about the issues surrounding the information they have gathered, and cite their sources with a greater understanding of the scholarly dialogue. Knowing that IL supports students in all subject areas, we took many small steps—from advocating for IL in course-integrated sessions to connecting with like-minded faculty on committees—and those led to the current widespread integration of IL concepts in the curriculum.

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