

Measuring Awareness of and Interest in the Online Writing Center at Dickinson College

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Objective

The purpose of conducting a survey about the online Writing Center was two-fold.

One objective was to measure student awareness and use of the online Writing Center during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another objective was to gauge student interest in using online Writing Services while studying abroad in the future.



Methodology

Number of respondents: 60

Margin of error: 12.9%

Date: March 25 – April 1, 2021

Method of interviewing: Surveys were conducted anonymously online. Student researchers sent the survey link to past classmates, roommates, members of the track team, members of club soccer, and members of a fraternity.

Demographic Information

Class Year

- 2021: 33%
- 2022: 22%
- 2023: 33%
- 2024: 12%

Race

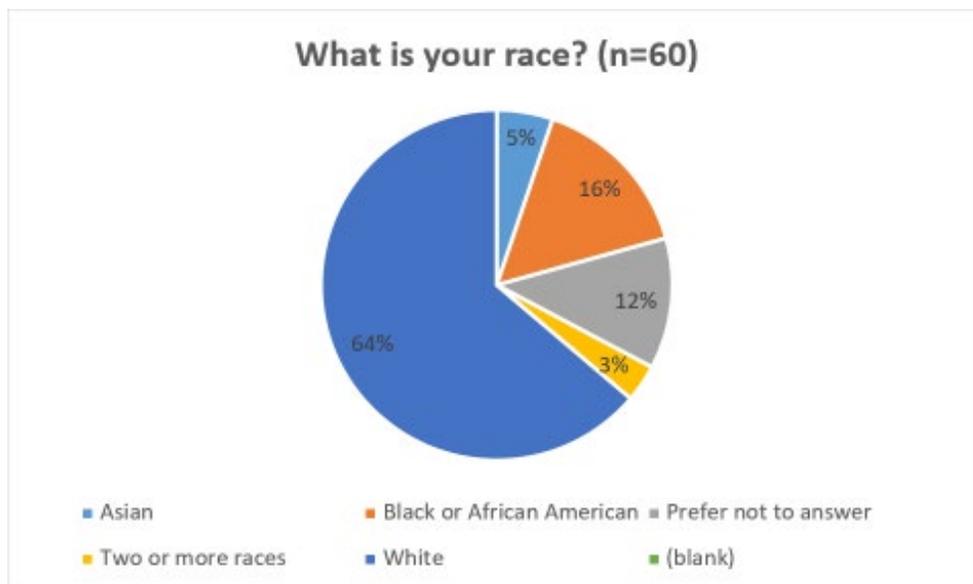
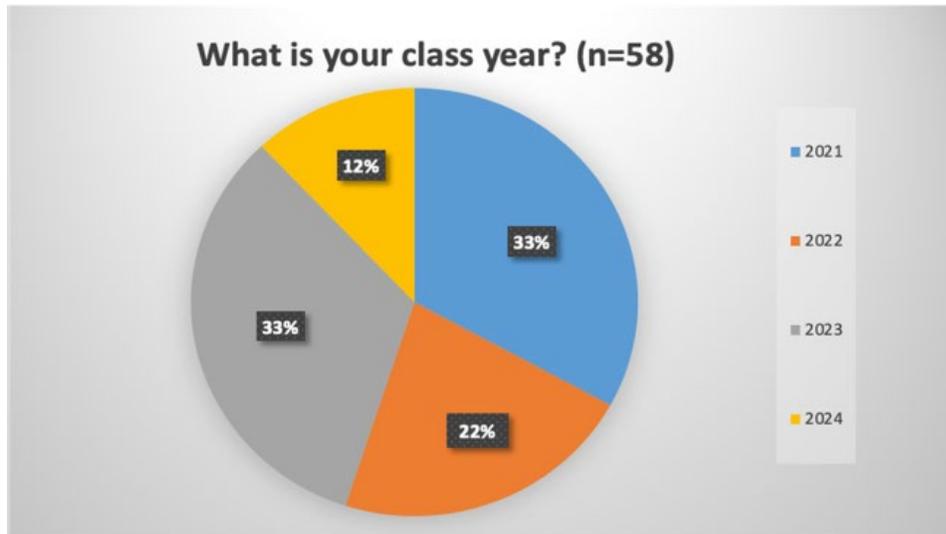
- White: 64%
- Black or African American: 16%
- Asian: 5%
- Two or more races: 3%
- Prefer not to answer: 12%

Gender

- Male: 44%
- Female: 53%
- Gender Variant or Non-Conforming: 1%
- Prefer not to Answer: 2%

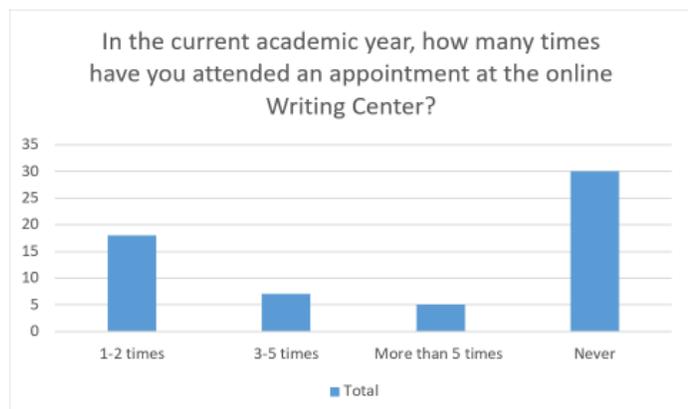
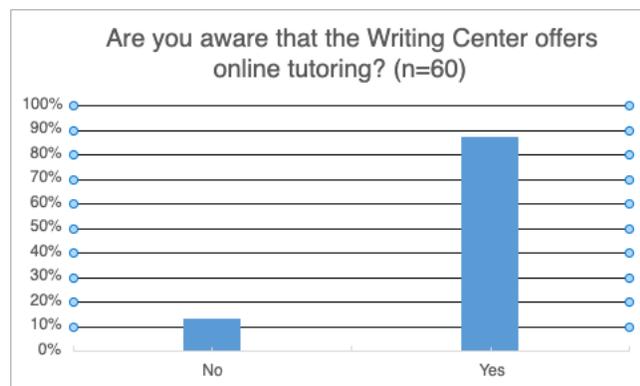
Ethnicity

- Hispanic or Latino: 9%
- Not Hispanic or Latino: 84%
- Prefer not to Answer: 7%



Key Takeaways From Univariate Statistics

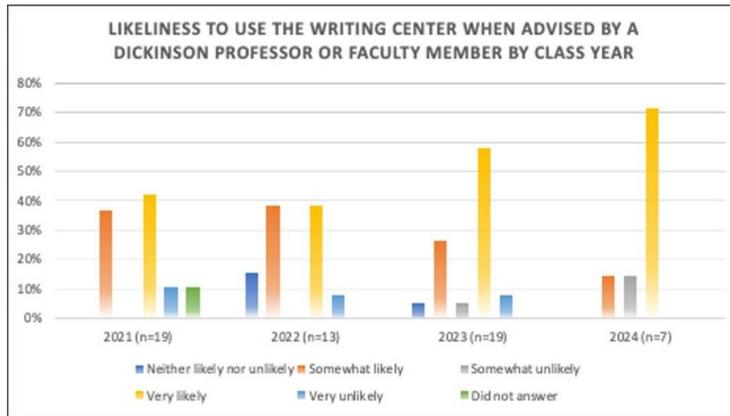
- Over 85% of respondents were aware of the online Writing Center.
- 50% of respondents had never used the online Writing Center.
- Of those respondents who had used the Writing Center, they rated the support they received at an average of 4.3 out of 5.
- 50% of respondents were very likely to use the Writing Center when advised by faculty.
- Online fatigue and poor time management most often prevented respondents from using the online Writing Center.
- 15% of respondents had studied abroad, and an additional 40% planned on it in the future.
- The larger the time difference between the study abroad country and Dickinson, the less likely respondents were to consider using the online Writing Center while abroad.
- 60% of respondents would not be interested in using the center abroad.



Relationship Between Class Year and Likeliness to Use the Writing Center when Advised by Faculty

What is your class year, and how likely are you to use the Writing Center when advised by faculty? (n=58)

From our “Writing Center Study,” we looked at how likely students are to use the Writing Center when advised by a Dickinson professor or faculty member. Specifically, we looked at the likelihood of students use of the Writing Center by class year. The class of 2021 (seniors), 2022 (juniors), and 2023 (sophomores) have spent time on campus during a normal academic year while the class of 2024 (freshmen) has not. A majority of respondents from each class year are “very likely” to use the Writing Center when advised by a Dickinson professor or faculty. This response surprised me for the freshmen class because I would think that they would not want to use the online format the Writing Center is currently working with. Compared to the freshmen and sophomore classes, the junior and senior classes had a lower response rate when choosing the answer “very likely.” In fact, the response rate for the answer “somewhat likely” is fairly equal to the response rate of “very likely” for these class years. I think this is because upper classmen have been able to develop a writing style they prefer over the course of their time at Dickinson and believe that they do not have a strong need to use the Writing Center when advised by a professor or faculty member. The type of responses collected by class year were expected.

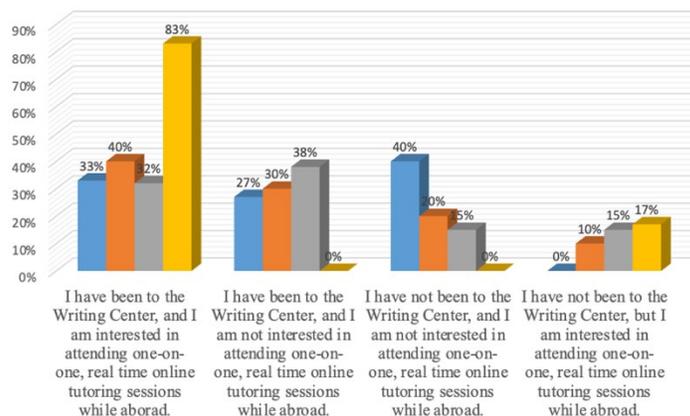


Relationship Between Class Year and Interest in Using the Online Writing Center While Abroad

What is your class year, and select the statement that best describes your view on utilizing the online Writing Center while abroad?

Students from the class of 2024 expressed the most interest in using the online Writing Center while abroad, with 100% of respondents of that age interested in using the center. Respondents from the class of 2022 were the second most supportive class, with 50% of the students interested. Students from the classes of 2023 and 2021 expressed about the same amount of interest, between 30-40%. Younger students generally seemed more open to the idea of utilizing the center while aboard. This suggests that the Writing Center should consider implementing online services in the future, when more of these students would be studying abroad. As of right now, it seems that implementing online services for students studying abroad would not pay off, since only 40% of students are interested. This low level of interest may be due to factors such as online fatigue from the remote classes that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interest in Using the Online Writing Center While Abroad, by Class Year



Relationship Between Class Year and Plans to Study Abroad

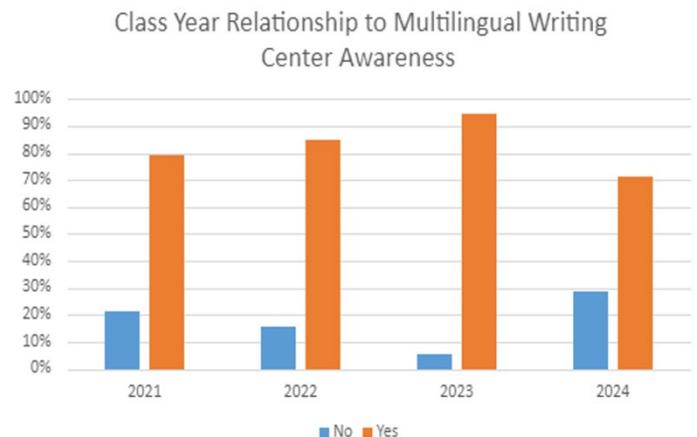
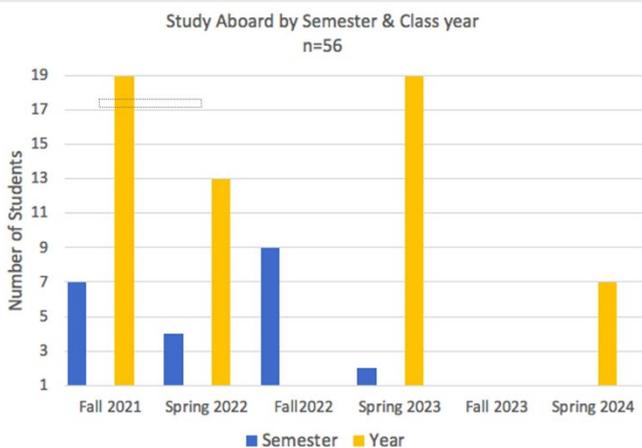
If applicable, what semester of what class year do you plan to study abroad, and what is your class year?

From our survey, we looked at students' plans to study abroad by class year. We also looked at the specifics by semester. This studying began by looking as early as Fall 2021 to Spring 2024. This would cover the full scope of current students now at the college. To measure this bivariate statistic, I combined the data by class year and semester to understand which semester had the most likely response to abroad activity. There is a lot of information that can be drawn from this data. Initially, Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 seemed to be the hot picks for study abroad. Many have missed the opportunity to go abroad because of the ongoing pandemic. Upcoming juniors are looking for that experience. I am sure GSCE is promoting the likelihood of these programs. Secondly, there is a drop in the class of 2023 and 2024, as I am sure study abroad is not a popular topic going on with these students. There are other obstacles that are presented to them then looking for a program that fits their best interest of study. I am sure not too many are even declared at this time. More can be gathered from the bivariate graphs, like the expected numbers of students to go abroad with the ongoing pandemic not being under control. The likelihood of universities accepting foreign students can be slim to none because it is unsafe. That should be taken into account as a limitation for the number of offered programs and the places students desire to study abroad. Even though it is not factor in our research or even my bivariate, safety is important in the numbers of study abroad.

Relationship Between Class Year and Awareness of Multilingual Writing Center

What is your class year, and are you aware that the Writing Center has tutors for multiple languages?

This bivariate question was used to measure how aware students were of the multilingual writing center by class year. The first reason it is important to understand this, is because all Dickinson students are required to learn a foreign language—unless of course they test out of it. It is highly important that students are aware of the resources available to them regarding their coursework. Secondly, by understanding how aware the different class years are of the multilingual writing center, this can better enable the writing center to interpret overall interest in online tutoring sessions for study abroad. In other words, if the class of 2024 appears to be less interested in tutoring sessions abroad, perhaps that is because they are less aware that the writing center offers a service which will be applicable to their country of choice. Looking at the graph, every class year had a significant level of awareness; interestingly, the class of 2023 was shown as being more aware of this service than the class of 2021 or 2022. Additionally, it is logical to see that the class of 2024 had the highest percentage of people who did not know the writing center offered this tutoring, as 30 percent of their respondents were unaware. The class of 2022 was shown as more aware than the class of 2021 with about 85 percent awareness, whereas the class of 2021 had about 80 percent.



Limitations and Future Improvements

One definite limitation of our Writing Center survey was the small number of respondents from the class of 2024. As a result of the small number of respondents from the class of 2024, the statistics regarding their support for and interest in the online Writing Center may not be as accurate as they could be. The members of our research group were mostly juniors and seniors, so we were not familiar with many first-year students. If we were to conduct the survey again, we would be sure to make a conscious effort in reaching this demographic.

Another limitation of our Writing Center survey was the time period and method by which we had to conduct the survey. Since we only had one week to collect as many respondents as possible, we ended up with a relatively small sample size with a large margin of error. We also had to send the link to individuals via text message or email, and respondents answered the survey questions online. If we had more resources in terms of time and money, perhaps we could have been able to conduct in-person interviews, during a non-pandemic year. By doing so, we might have been able to collect additional information and answer any questions respondents had as they participated in the survey.