Building a Self-Serve Writing Center for the UNC campuses

Overview of UNC-CH Writing Center Handouts
At the Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, we have developed an online version of our onsite services. The Online Writing Center includes a small, but growing database of handouts that address common questions about academic writing. We think of these handouts as our "self-serve" writing center, a resource that members of the University community can access at their convenience and at their own pace. Our service demonstrates technology's power to reach and teach a broad spectrum of undergraduate students and to support faculty who encourage their students to become strong writers.

In our development so far, students and faculty have responded enthusiastically to the handouts on our website. Students appreciate the relative unanimity with which they can access help. For example, a different, additional group of students access our online services than use our onsite services. For us, this difference suggests that a new group of students, students who might not otherwise attempt to improve as writers, are now strengthening their skills. Faculty appreciate the ease with which they can help their students write better papers. By linking to our site or to particular handouts within the site, faculty point their students to writing resources while underscoring the importance of writing in their courses. For example, UNC-CH faculty regularly link to our handouts on "Writing an Argument in Academic Writing" and "Tips on Approaching Writing Assignments" or to discipline-specific handouts such as "Writing in History" in their course websites or syllabi.

Benefit to the UNC campuses
The Writing Center regularly receives requests from faculty across the country who wish to link our handouts to their course websites or to print them for inclusion in coursepacks. While the UNC-CH Writing Center director has informally talked with or had visits from her peers at UNC-Pembroke, Fayetteville State, NC State and other regional community colleges, no formal attempt has yet been made to share resources or coordinate efforts. Just as students and faculty at UNC-CH link to these resources, so too could members of other school communities. Doing so may save others from "reinventing the wheel" on their campuses.

Measurable Outcomes
With grant monies, the UNC-CH Writing Center could add handouts on our site. While the present collection of handouts is helpful, it is in no way complete. We see immediate need for or have had requests for 12 or more new handouts. These would include disciplinary handouts on writing in sociology and women's studies as well as handouts on the accepted conventions for literature reviews, research proposals, Chicago/Turabian citation style and annotated bibliographies. Students frequently request more resources on research strategies, plagiarism and the writing process including information on brainstorming, outlining, proper use of evidence, and audience. We could also develop handouts that would assist students with the integration of writing and technology, including a handout on using Microsoft Word's comment feature that would encourage peer-to-peer response over email.

Dissemination of Handouts
With a link in the Collaborative Portal and other advertising, other UNC system schools could easily make use of our handouts. We have purposely maintained these materials in open access space on our site (other parts of the site are password protected) so that the handouts are easily and readily available to those who need them. The UNC-CH Writing Center and the director hold copyright on the material, but we freely share what we have created for educational purposes. Since the UNC-CH Online Writing Center has established a framework for writing