

By Our WTS

Issue 11.1, May 2018



THE IU WRITING TUTORIAL SERVICES ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

Saying goodbye to a few of our own

A few of our tutors left us in December because they graduated early or studied elsewhere!

BY GABRIEL JONES

When Emily first got to IU, it wasn't her favorite place in the world. She initially struggled to find her role in the overwhelmingly big campus environment, an issue with which many freshmen deal.

But everything changed second semester when she started to get involved with IU Recreational Sports and WTS.

At WTS she started to find roles where she could be valuable, put her skills to use, and make friends. As an exercise science major, her coursework usually does not involve the kinds of creative analytical writing she sees at WTS.

"Being a writing tutor has allowed me to hang on to those writing skills and still be involved in the writing process."

In addition to writing, WTS has allowed Emily to capitalize on interpersonal skills. "I really work well in one-on-one and small group settings, so being a tutor is where I feel comfortable."

While her six semesters at WTS have been filled with many positive memories, the most rewarding one "started out as a mistake, but ended up being one of my best experiences."



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In a scheduling error, she was assigned to work with a multi-lingual Informatics Master's student. After the first day of helping her student build a work portfolio for job applications, Emily built a strong relationship with her student, who came back to see her every week. In the end, with Emily's help, the student accepted an impressive job offer. It was great to be a part of that, she said.

Apart from WTS, Emily has made Bloomington feel like home and developed her passion for exercise science through IU Rec Sports and eventually Force Fitness, where she now works 20–25 hours per week.

She is excited to take the next step toward her dream career of working in the personal coaching and conditioning industry by starting a 1.5 year accelerated Master's in Biomechanics this spring.

As she moves on, she would like to thank everyone at WTS for being so friendly.

"I've learned from you all and have really enjoyed my time."

Interact with WTS!



WTS Alumni



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***By Our WTS is produced for the peer tutor alumni of
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Please read, think and write back to us. Any comments on this issue or updates you wish to be included in upcoming issues may be directed to:
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Sydney will spend her last semester on a southern U.S. tour

BY ZAHRA BHOY

After studying counseling in developing countries at IU for 3 ½ years, Sydney Newell will spend the next 7 months touring the southern United States with the Daraja Children's Choir as a junior tour leader.

"[Daraja] is a Christian organization," Sydney said. "Daraja is partnered with a ministry that's a nonprofit that does sustainable development in countries such as Uganda. We've partnered together and the kids are from a 410 Bridge community." 410 Bridge is a Christian organization that serves to empower nations.

As a junior tour leader, Sydney will be responsible for communicating with church leaders, setting up worship services and learning the ins and outs of running a nonprofit. She will also be responsible for watching over the children she's traveling with, since all the interns are the children's primary caretakers for 7 months.

"I'm so excited," Sydney said. "I'm a little bit nervous, but more so excited. I've worked with the ministry before, so I already know that this is something I love and am passionate about. I'm more nervous because it's an administrative role, so I'll be doing a lot of learning, but the excitement overpowers it."

Sydney will be traveling with 18 children, 3 American interns, 3 Ugandan interns and 2 Ugandan teachers on a tour bus for the next 7 months. They travel to a new city every 2-3 days. Every time they visit a new city, they live with a new host family, and the children perform at a new church.

"During the day, the kids have school with the 2 Ugandan teachers that travel with us," Sydney said. "One day we'll have a worship service, and outside of that, the family members will organize something for us to do.

That's kind of exciting to be able to experience the way different families live across the United States."

Overall, Daraja aims to bring American churches a better understanding of worship.

"The purpose behind Daraja is that we bring kids to the United States for worship," Sydney said. "A lot of people assume that a bunch of kids are coming from Uganda to America and they assume that these kids come from extreme poverty and some of these kids do, but it's not a materialistic thing. It's really about what the children are giving the family and the people they're coming in contact with. What I've seen is that the Ugandan children give American people way more than the American people could ever give them in return."



Saying farewell...

Major: Human Biology

How WTS affected me: WTS has been one of the best opportunities during my time here at IU! From fun supervisors and co-workers, to making a difference in students' writing abilities, my time at WTS has been incredible. I have personally grown so much in my communication skills and teaching methods. I will miss working for WTS so much.

Plans after graduation: I plan to attend IU's Doctorate of Physical Therapy School Program after graduation.

RACHEL GIBSON



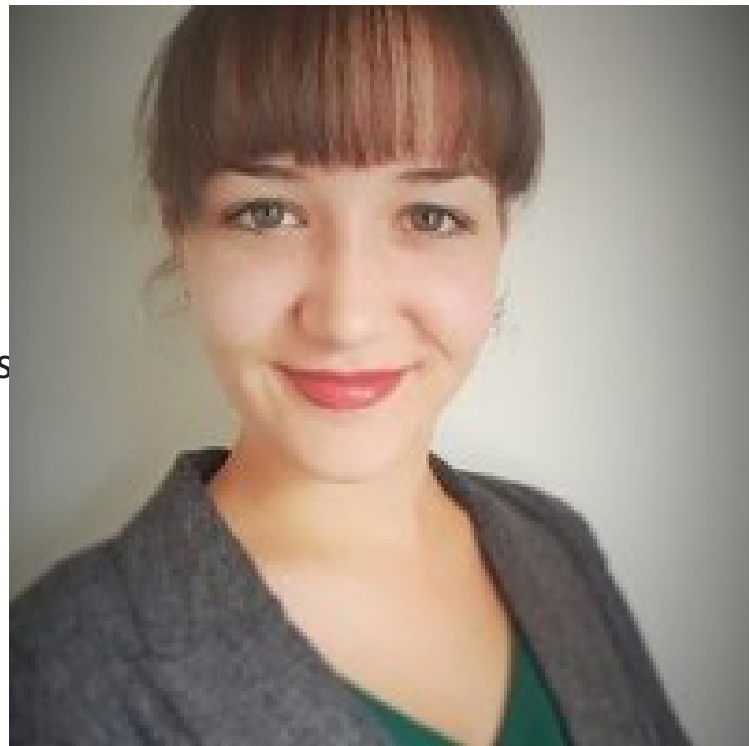
...to the class of 2018...

LINDSEY ROBINSON

Major: Anthropology and Linguistics

How WTS affected me: I have been working with WTS since my freshman year, and being in this position has given me more confidence not only in my own writing but also in my ability to identify issues and work one on one with individuals to address them. The people I have had the pleasure of working with at WTS have pushed me to think critically about new ideas and it has been an honor to work alongside all of them.

Plans after graduation: I will be working full time as Stewardship Coordinator for The Language Conservancy in Bloomington. TLC is a nonprofit organization working to revitalize endangered languages, particularly Native American languages.



Here's to changing lives...

Major: Journalism

SARA MILLER

How WTS affected me: WTS showed me just how vital being able to communicate clearly with others is to virtually every major, organization and/or profession. The tools I've learned to use with tutees have helped me make my writing sharper and stronger. WTS has given me the chance to get to know and work closely with so many incredibly talented and interesting tutors, and I'll look back on my time at WTS as one of the best parts of my time at IU.

Plans after graduation: I'll be interning this summer with Giffords, former Congresswoman Gabby Giffords' nonprofit to end gun violence.



...wherever you go!

AMY SCHULLER



Major: English and Media Advertising

How WTS affected me: It really strengthened my ability to communicate with others, and in areas I didn't even know I needed improvement! I'm much more confident in my skills in empathy and leadership. And I've met the most genuine human beings in my fellow tutors and bosses! My only regret is that I wasn't a tutor longer.

Plans after graduation: Hopefully I'll be working in the media industry as a creative content creator.

Major: French and English

How WTS affected me: WTS not only gave me the opportunity to help my peers with their own writing but also led me to start thinking more critically about my own writing as well.

Plans after graduation: I will be spending the next school year as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant in France before starting my PhD in French at the University of Michigan in the fall of 2019.

ADAM SMITH



GABRIEL JONES



Major:

International Studies, Informatics,
Spanish, Liberal Arts & Management
Program

How WTS affected me: Working at WTS has been like completing an additional undergraduate major; it's allowed me to learn so much from working with a diverse group of students on various assignments. I've really enjoyed spending time with my "friendly and helpful" coworkers. WTS has fostered a passion in me for education and language acquisition, and I hope to act on that passion some day as a professor.

Plans after graduation:

I will work as a business technology consultant for Accenture in Chicago.

TANISHA DASMUNSHI



Major: English, French, Liberal Arts Management Program

How WTS affected me: WTS taught me how to write, how to help others write, and how to find joy in the (sometimes really not joyful) writing process.

Plans after graduation: After graduation, I've decided to serve in an AmeriCorps program tutoring students in the Chicago Public School system.

Self-Advocacy

BY HALEY WILSON

I wonder if students are annoyed or worry when they notice that my face is abnormally close to their assignment sheet as I skim the criteria. Or when I think I'm making eye contact, but my eyes seem to wander around the room, or even more fun, shake violently.

But mostly, I wonder when I ask a guarded student, "Do you mind handing me your computer? I can't read that from here."

I thought the Professional Self Advocacy Working Group would be easy to plan. After all, the words "self advocacy" are inextricable from my sense of self: The title of the chapter of my memoir on the K-12 years will definitely be called "How I (Supposedly) Learned to Advocate for Myself."

On the contrary, I found that, according to Google Almighty, the only people who need to learn to advocate for themselves are the disabled or disgruntled employees asking for a raise.

After I found the internet to be of no use, I decided improvisation was the only option left to me.

The core of my lesson was an ancient proverb (recently written by my best friend, with an audience of one in mind): "You're not special," the "you" here of course being me. The elevation of my heart rate and catch in my breathing when I ask a student to hand me their computer is not warranted: I am not a tutoring machine, and while what I am asking for, to me, is the difference between being able to do my job and not, to the student, it should be a small thing.

And since none of us tutors is actually a machine, I'm not special. I'm not the only one who has to ask for little things to make this tutorial possible. I'm probably also not the only one who finds that question just a little bit challenging.

I recognize that I don't have all the answers – some days I do an exceptionally poor job of advocating for myself. But I know that one way we can all improve in this arena is to recognize that no one among us is special.

Where are they now? WTS Tutor Edition

BY TANISHA DASMUNSHI

Katelyn Klingler, former WTS tutor who graduated in the class of 2017, credits her time as writing tutor as key to her choice of pursuing a career in law.

Klingler is currently taking a gap year, as she prepares her applications for law school. She's still a force on the IU Bloomington campus: she works part-time in an administrative role for the English department, as well as for Alvin Rosenfeld, Irving M. Glazer Chair in Jewish Studies.

She currently assists Rosenfeld with his work as Director of the Center for the Study of Contemporary Anti-Semitism. After taking a class with Rosenfeld, about the "Literature of the Holocaust," she became a teaching assistant for the class in the years following.

That experience, coupled with her experience as writing tutor, had Klingler considering academia for a while. She decided not to pursue graduate study in English because she felt she'd be "inventing problems to solve."

With law, she said she can still "employ careful language and pay attention to the interpretation, and continue to think about what can and cannot be defined."

She's most excited by constitutional law because "WTS taught me how to be articulate about language and argumentation, which is what I'm excited to do again in law school."

WTS Tutor Retreat

BY LUMA KHABBAZ

On Saturday, February 24, 2018, about 30 tutors gathered to discuss second language acquisition, English W131, and other topics pertaining to multilingual learners. This retreat, entirely funded through donations made to the WTS IU Foundation account, was the first ever held for the WTS staff.

When tutors originally expressed an interest in having a retreat, they were asked to vote on the topic that they thought was most pressing. Because many tutors see multilingual students daily at WTS, the overwhelming majority voted to learn more about how to help this particular group of writers.

The goal of this retreat was to equip tutors with knowledge about second language acquisition to guide them when working with multilingual writers. Tara Zahler, a WTS tutor and Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Second Language Studies, began the program with a presentation about how these students acquire advanced English proficiency. While Zahler introduced theories of language acquisition, her focus was on practical tips to use in tutoring situations.

One of these applicable tips was reminding tutors to prioritize meaning, not form, as well as to help students notice their patterns of error. Oftentimes, students don't notice that they need help with something until a tutor points it out.

Most important, though, is for tutors to understand that there is a messy process that all multilingual students will go through along their path toward fluency. This process often starts with basic communication that would make sense to a listener in context but that might be more difficult to understand in writing. Students will then learn to construct grammatical forms of increasing complexity. However, as part of the acquisition process, students may over-apply new rules that then appear to create additional errors. As a result, progress may look like regression as students try more complicated sentence constructions. Understanding where students are in the process of learning to write in English can help tutors provide targeted feedback.

Zahler reminded tutors to stay patient with their tutees.

"Teaching alters the rate that they go through these sequences, but not the route," Zahler said.

After Zahler's presentation, a panel of W131 ML instructors provided insight into their students and their particular struggles with the assignments in this course, which helped tutors understand how they can better assist their tutees.

One of the panelists stressed the importance of instilling confidence in students. Often, ML writers don't feel as if they have ownership over the words they write; instructors have to remind them they have the authority to make their own claims. This reluctance to take a stand is a problem that tutors see in many native English speakers as well.

This similarity points to an important takeaway from the retreat. Students of many backgrounds, multilingual or not, will struggle to develop ideas and will make mistakes in writing. Instead of fixating on mistakes, tutors have an opportunity to help students with both meaning and form.



Tutor what you teach: Reflections from Lindsay Munnelly

BY GABRIEL JONES

Working as an instructor places someone at the forefront of a generation's growth and development. These special people endure the highs and lows of dozens of students' experiences each semester. Seeing students succeed inside and outside the classroom makes it worth the effort, according to English Ph.D. candidate and WTS tutoring veteran Lindsay Munnelly.

Lindsay teaches English W131, the infamous class that several other WTS tutors and Ph.D. candidates teach. Even though she considers the class somewhat of a "cookie cutter," with its standardized approach to writing, she understands that students develop very necessary skills that apply to all disciplines.

"Maybe because of technology," Lindsay says, "students tend to think they won't need to write, but they do. I like giving them the tools. It's nice to see the skills click."

The skills don't always click right away. Sometimes it can be frustrating when multiple ways of explaining concepts don't seem to work, but ultimately these building blocks set them up for long-term success.

While instructors are at the forefront of education, the profession still has its limitations. It's impossible to get to know every student well each semester just by seeing them in class, grading their papers, and hosting occasional office hours. Sometimes it can be challenging to understand the thought processes and personalities of students without direct, uninterrupted, one-on-one interaction.

This unique opportunity for deep interaction is exactly what working at Writing Tutorial Services provides, according to Lindsay. She finds that while "teaching gives me a chance to interact with students, I like how the one-on-one

interactions as a tutor allow me to tailor teaching to an individual."

Working at WTS allows her to see the other side of her teaching – how students think about and react to assignments when their section's instructor isn't watching.

Lindsay really enjoys hearing students talk about concepts in their own words, how much they're understanding, and in what ways. "It's a behind-the-scenes look that I wish all teachers could experience."

Of course, sometimes it can be hard to step out of the role of teacher and just tutor students. "It's hard because we don't want to overstep and direct the student too much, saying, 'I teach this, so I know what I'm doing.'"

What's even more challenging is when the "behind the scenes look" reveals that students are deeply frustrated with their classroom experience. W131 is a very familiar course for Lindsay, and many of the instructors are colleagues, friends, and fellow tutors.

"It's disheartening when a student says the instructor doesn't care and doesn't want to help them," because often the students are criticizing people she knows well.

Since Lindsay usually tutors students from different sections, she can't help but wonder what students really think about her.

Despite the occasional awkward moments, Lindsay values what WTS adds to her role as an educator beyond the classroom.

Even a class of 22 is way too big to understand everyone, since normally just 9-10 students participate on any given day, Lindsay said.

At WTS, Lindsay, and the many other tutors who teach W131 can get complete student engagement in a low-stress environment where the goal is not to teach directly but to actively involve students in their own learning.

When it clicks

BY SYDNEY NEWELL

“Oh my gosh. I have to start over.” I looked at the student as she stared back at me with eyes full of terror. We were about thirty minutes into the session, and the student came to the realization that her thesis was not as complex as it needed to be. I had been waiting for her to get to this point, and I already had words of assurance to speak to her.

“No, you don’t have to start over. You see how we have been brainstorming and gathering evidence for the past thirty minutes?”

She nods.

“Well, you’ve already done the work. Here is all of your additional evidence and supporting details.” I can tell by the look in her eyes that she barely hears me. I try again. “Just because you change your thesis doesn’t mean you have to change your entire essay.”

That got her attention.

At this point in tutorials, I like to explain the writing process to students. I tell this student that the writing process is fluid. You start with a question that you may not know how to answer. As you gather evidence and supporting details, it is possible that your original thesis changes.

This does not mean that you need to re-write your essay. On the contrary, you simply need to re-construct your thesis and figure out the evidence that supports or does not support your new thesis. The irrelevant evidence can be discarded, while the supporting evidence remains in the paper. You can then go back through and add in new, supporting evidence.

I can easily see when a student finally understands this part of the writing process, because a look of relief visibly replaces the deer-in-the-headlights look.

“I can do that?” the student asks me. I smile and nod my head. “Okay, then maybe this writing process isn’t so bad after all,” she says half to herself.

At this point, I laugh, because if I am honest, I was a little worried she would leave the tutorial in tears. Thankfully, something about the writing process finally clicked in her head and she now has a more positive view of how to write an essay.

I have yet to experience a tutorial when this explanation failed to calm the student. If this student could not hear me above her internal (or external) tears, I imagine it would be my turn to look like a deer in headlights. However, at that point, I would begin to explicitly show the student the connection between her ideas and what she has already written. I would also encourage the student to take deep breaths and to put the pencil down for a moment.

Sometimes, it takes a step back to take a step forward. If the student continues to cry, it may be time for the person at the desk to rescue you and the student from more tear-filled work. I hope you (and the desk person) never make it to that point.