Crafting a Personal Statement Workshop
A Cross-Campus Collaboration Model

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UGA By the Numbers

University of Georgia:
- Large, public, research institution in Athens, GA
- Undergraduate student population: 28,848 (2019)

Career Center:
- 5 Pre-Health Team Consultants
- 13 total career consultants
- Offered Writing Labs and personal statement critiques

Writing Center:
- 13 Writing Consultants (English PhD students)
- 30-minute writing consultation appointments with undergraduates
  - Fall 2018: 1,397 consultations
  - Spring 2019: 1,176 writing consultations
  - 2018-2019: 2,617 writing consultations including summer (44 more sessions)
- Five locations across UGA campus
UGA By the Numbers

Pre-Professional Advising Office:
• Serves all current undergraduates and alumni that identify as pre-professional.

Pre-Professional Office Advising Staff:
• Coordinator
• 2 pre-med advisors
• 1 dental/optometry advisor
• 1 physician assistant advisor
• 1 allied health advisor (PT, OT, etc.)
• 1 pre-law advisor.

Total student population: ~4,800*
Pre-Health student population: ~4,100
• Pre-Medical: ~2,400
• Pre-Dental: ~305
• Pre-PA: ~580
• Allied Health (OT, PT, GC, AA, etc.): ~520
• Nursing: ~350
• Pre-Optometry: ~36

Pre-Law student population: ~700

*Based on students flagged in SAGE advising system.
The Problem

• High numbers of students competing for limited resources

• Lack of student knowledge regarding on-campus resources for personal statement review

• Multiple units on campus providing duplicate services with little-to-no collaboration
Workshop Goals

Student Goals:
• Exposure to variety of resources available across campus
• Increase usage of these resources
• Connect to professional students for feedback and potential mentorship
• Receive feedback from professional consultants
• Ease student anxiety and prevent procrastination
• Produce strong personal statements

Professional Goals:
• Engage alumni
• Provide template for other professionals
• Create a cross-campus collaboration model
• Offer workshop materials for students online to increase access
• Encourage more communication and access between offices and sharing of resources
Collaboration & Outreach

- Identified and connected with Career Center, Writing Center and Pre-Professional Advising Office staff interested in collaborating on a workshop Series.
  - Volunteers:
    - 2 Pre-Professional Advisors
    - 10 Career Consultants
    - 7 Writing Center Staff (PhD students in English and Linguistics)

- Lead advisors met to discuss organizational details. Included the Associate Director of the Writing Center virtually. Discussion topics included:
  - Personal statement format
  - Commitment
  - Logistics
  - Alumni Outreach
  - Promotional materials
  - Educational materials
  - Training
  - Schedule
  - Feedback
Preparation & Utilization of Resources

- **Created** syllabus with session breakdown for workshop participants.

- **Compiled** a workshop packet which included:
  - Newly developed education materials
  - Materials that were already in use from various units
  - Uploaded content to website after completion of workshop

- **Provided** training PowerPoint to professional consultants.
  - Ensured all were on the same page regarding what makes a quality pre-professional personal statement.
Preparation & Utilization of Resources

- **Condensed** training PPT into a shorter guideline for professional students.

- ** Recruited ** 23 current professional students via email:
  - 13 medical
  - 5 dental
  - 2 law
  - 2 genetic counseling
  - 1 anesthesiologist assistant

- **Reached** out to 3 current pre-professional students that received a professional school acceptance to ask if we could read their personal statements out loud during the second in-person session as examples of excellent writing.
Workshop Structure

• Workshop held over 8 weeks (February 13 – April 3).

• Feedback survey (April 12).

• 24-hour registration opened with 30 seats available (January 24).

• 36 students registered, 30 received confirmation email, 3 students emailed with waitlist request.

• Prioritized students applying during the 2019/2020.

• 9 students received wait-list email connecting them with Personal Statement Workshops later in the semester with the Career Center.

Final breakdown

- 16 Pre-Med
- 3 Pre-Dental
- 3 Pre-Law
- 2 Pre-PA

- 1 Pre-OT
- 1 Pre-PT
- 2 Genetic Counseling
- 1 Anesthesiologist Assistant
Workshop Structure

• **In-person sessions:**
  • 3 in-person sessions.
  • 2 hour blocks

• **Virtual sessions (Emailed feedback):**
  • 5 virtual sessions
  • One week given between each deadline with the exception of the second draft due to spring break.
  • 10am deadlines for all drafts.

• **Feedback:**
  • 27 out of 30 participants surveyed
  • 1 student never came
  • 2 students dropped out after professional student feedback.
Introduction to UGA’s Personal Statement Workshop Series

Logistical Considerations:
• No more than 2 students were assigned to each volunteer.
  • Professional student commitment:
    • 1 virtual feedback session.
  • Professional consultant commitment:
    • 1 in-person feedback session.
    • 1 virtual feedback session.

• One advisor designated to send all emails and connect participants with both professional students and volunteers.

• Email templates prepared ahead of time.

• Email reminders for all deadlines & sessions sent two days in advance.

• Designated advisor copied on all drafts and feedback exchanges.
Introduction to UGA’s Personal Statement Workshop Series

• **Session 1 (In-Person):**
  • In-depth personal statement writing presentation and interactive writing activities.
  • Participants received assignment for next session.
  • Read 3 student personal statement examples

• **Session 2 (In-Person):**
  • Pair & Share, PEEL outline and a first draft write-in session.
  • Participants given one week to work on their first draft which is due at the time of the 3rd session.

• **Session 3 (Virtual):**
  • Students email first draft by 10am on designated session 3 date.
  • Professional students have a week to provide feedback virtually to participants.
Introduction to UGA’s Personal Statement Workshop Series

• **Session 4 (Virtual):**
  - Professional students must submit feedback to participants by designated session 4 date.
  - Participants are given two weeks to work on their second draft (includes UGA spring break).

• **Session 5: (Virtual):**
  - Participants submit their second draft to designated advisor by 10am to be paired with a professional consultant.
  - Professional consultants given a week to review statements for an in-person feedback session at the next meeting.
Introduction to UGA’s Personal Statement Workshop Series

• **Session 6 (In-Person):**
  • Participants receive in-person feedback from the professional consultants during this session.
  • Final draft write-ins for remainder of time – participants were not required to stay after their meeting with their professional consultant.
  • Participants given a week to finish their final draft and send it to their professional consultants.

• **Session 7 (Virtual):**
  • Participants submit final draft by 10am to their professional consultant.
  • Professional consultants have a week to provide feedback on final draft.

• **Session 8 (Virtual):**
  • Participants receive feedback on final draft from professional consultants.
Participant Feedback

I felt well-informed about the objectives of this workshop including its intended goals and my responsibilities as a participant.

Strongly Agree 87%
Agree 13%

“The deadlines kept me on track and the feedback was tremendously helpful.”

-STUDENT PARTICIPANT
Participant Feedback

This workshop lived up to my expectations.

"I felt uncertain about the content of my personal statement but the feedback I received helped me to strengthen my content and feel confident about it."

- STUDENT PARTICIPANT
Participant Feedback

The pace of this workshop was appropriate.

“The first meeting about what to include in a personal statement and how to structure it was very helpful!”

- STUDENT PARTICIPANT
Participant Feedback

The activities in this workshop gave me sufficient practice and feedback.

"They provided me with an in-depth critique of my personal statement. They really challenged me to rearrange some things and to explain more about what I was trying to convey."

- STUDENT PARTICIPANT
At the end of this workshop, I had a solid start or completed draft of my personal statement.

“I think the best part of this workshop was finishing with a piece of work that is almost complete. If I had not participated in this workshop, I would have waited until the end of the school year to write the personal statement.”

-STUDENT PARTICIPANT
Takeaways

Things We Learned

• First session was too content heavy.

• Professional student volunteers would benefit from more guidance on how to give constructive feedback.
  • Examples of properly reviewed and edited papers or a rubric.

• Personal statement review/feedback can be subjective.
  • Provide students tools for reconciling conflicting pieces of advice.

• Workshop provides extensive support, but only for a small number of students.
  • Possible challenges scaling the program due to staff and volunteer availability.
Takeaways

Moving Forward

• Extend to other campus partners to be able to scale up to 50 students per semester.

• Continue to grow professional student database.

• Open registration earlier in order to recruit professional students in the participants chosen area.

• Record lecture components of workshop series and add to our website.
Questions?

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Behind the Scenes

January 24:
• Opened registration for the workshop (10am).

January 25:
• Closed registration (10am) and emailed students about their status (enrolled v. wait-listed).

February 6 & 11:
• Sent reminder email to participants regarding the first in-person session.

February 13:
• **Session 1:** Presented in-depth PowerPoint regarding personal statement writing and managed interactive writing activities. Announced collaboration with professional students to encourage continued participation. Gave students a writing assignment on themes.

February 18:
• Sent reminder email regarding next in-person session.
• Sent professional students the names and emails of the participants they will be paired with as well as a guideline and sample questions for reference.

February 20:
• **Session 2:** Did a peer pair & share activity, discussed the PEEL outline and held a first draft write-in session.

February 25:
• Sent reminder email to participants to submit their first draft by 10am on February 27.
Behind the Scenes

February 27:
• **Session 3:** Confirmed that all participants had submitted their first draft. Connected these participants with their professional student volunteers via an introductory email.
• Contacted the participants who had not submitted their first draft by the deadline to assess how to move forward.

March 6:
• **Session 4:** Confirmed that all professional students had submitted their feedback. Reminded participants that they have two weeks to complete their second draft.
• Sent professional consultants the names and emails of the participants they will be paired with.

March 18:
• Sent reminder email to participants to submit their second draft by 10am on March 20.

March 20:
• **Session 5:** Confirmed that all participants had submitted their second draft. Connected participants with professional consultants via an introductory email.
• Contacted the participants who had not submitted their second draft by the deadline to assess how to move forward.

March 26:
• Sent reminder email to participants and professional consultants regarding the upcoming in-person feedback session.
Behind the Scenes

March 28:
• Session 6: In-person feedback from the professional consultants.
• Final draft write-in.

April 1:
• Emailed students a reminder of their April 3 final draft deadline.

April 3:
• Session 7: Confirmed that all participants submitted their final draft via email.

April 8:
• Emailed reminder to professional consultants to send final draft feedback via email to their assigned participants by April 10.

April 10:
• Session 8: Confirmed that final draft feedback was sent to participants.

April 12:
• Feedback: Sent survey to 27 participants, complied data and shared results with both professional students and professional consultants. Over 50% of students responded.