

INVITATION FROM THE TEAM

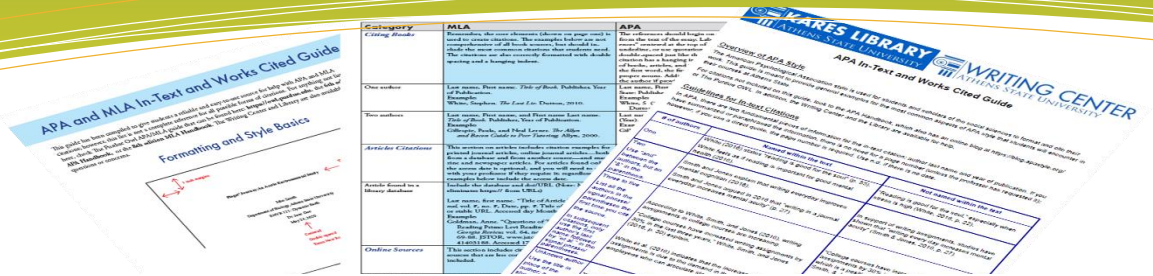
Many of you have already received an email invitation to participate in a small group conversation. If you haven't, you will receive one soon. Watch your email and carve out a little bit of time to dedicate to this discussion. Your input is extremely valuable.

Faculty are also encouraged to get their students involved. There are two open opportunities for students to:

1. Design a logo for the QEP
2. Participate in discussions associated with the available literature.

Student Clubs and Organizations are also welcome to join in these activities.

If you have questions on getting your students involved, please email Katia Maxwell at katia.maxwell@athens.edu



Internships and Experiential Learning: A Case Study from the Writing Center

By Dr. Chet Breaux

Writing centers are vibrant, complex spaces where directors and tutors are frequently required to act in a variety of roles. For me, one of those roles is content writer/designer/publisher. The Writing Center houses, publishes, and distributes a variety of guides for our students. These were created as teaching tools, materials designed to help make our students more self-reliant. The most popular of these resources is our APA Quick Reference Guide, a document intended to point students to the most commonly cited source types in APA like books and articles. In past semesters, we've distributed up to 500 of these to students in the Writing Center and Library. The main concern in creating these resources was content, and we wanted to ensure that we included information for the source types students were most likely to encounter during their coursework. While successful in that regard, the overall design of our guide can be cumbersome and overwhelming to a student unfamiliar with APA. For over a year I had researched how other writing centers had approached this problem, and I found that most (if not all) had completely ignored the design of their documents, focusing (unsurprisingly) on the text only. After all, center directors and tutors are almost exclusively trained to focus on text rather than the visual dimensions of a document. Visual design is a core facet of content creation, and I wondered how our documents might be impacted if we ever had a proper designer take a hard look at them.

When the current QEP topic was selected, I thought it appropriate to consider ways experiential learning could address our design issues. I reached out to some of our Art faculty and Jessica Spowart, an Assistant Professor of Art and Graphic design, recommended a student for an internship opportunity.

Setting up the internship process was straightforward due in part to the work of our fantastic Art Department. They already had an internship course established, so the syllabi/paperwork portion was easy. In collaboration with the intern, we all discussed needs, workflow, and timeframes. Within a few meetings, our partnership was established and running. Over the course of the semester, the student intern radically re-designed our documents around the needs of students.

I was an English major as an undergraduate, and internships for English majors in many parts of the country are scarce. I thus had no frame of reference for thinking about how internships could impact student learning on our campus. I've learned two important lessons through this process that I hope can help to inform some thinking in fields that are traditionally lacking internship opportunities. The first lesson is to think critically about what an internship means. To me, an internship was a paid position in a company, but that's a very narrow description of how internships often work. The key to my own thinking about internships ended up being the focus on a specific problem (our poorly-designed documents), and that helped me envision an internship as a solution. I am currently writing an article about our experiences with this internship, and I have yet to stumble across a single writing center/art program collaboration, which I now know is a wasted opportunity. The second lesson is to view our students as pre-professionals. In all my research on document design, I had never come across a solution that invited students to participate in our problem solving processes. This is a mistake. Internships can form the basis of powerful, meaningful partnerships between our academic units and our students. Based on this experience, I am considering other ways that interns can be housed in the writing center, and ways that those interns can help improve our services.