Senior Lecturer Susan Andersen Named Director of the USU Writing Center

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Susan Anderson

Susan Andersen became director of the USU Writing Center in the middle of the pandemic, which meant she needed to lead the Writing Center when tutoring was online, mostly through Zoom. She found that this difficult transition turned out to be the perfect time to scale back and focus directly on the students, tutors, and the mission statement of the Writing Center, which the tutors wrote themselves: “The Utah State University Writing Centers provide a positive and inclusive environment for university writers to improve their communication skills. We collaborate with writers and communicators of all levels, on all subjects, and through all stages of writing. During our one-with-one tutoring sessions, we ask questions, explore ideas, research solutions, practice writing concepts, and build connections. We believe writing isn’t just a thing we do, but an extension of everything we do.”

Susan started teaching at USU in 2001 and began working in the Writing Center in 2008. Star Coulbrooke, who served as director from 2008 to 2020, recommended her for the assistant director position after chatting with Susan in the grocery store aisle. “Star asked me if I knew anyone who would like to be assistant director, and I said, ‘What about me?’” Susan and Star became close friends and colleagues, and after Star’s retirement in 2020, Susan was hired as director.

During the eighteen months of the pandemic when the Writing Center was completely online, tutors learned a lot of tips and tools for successful virtual tutoring sessions. Many students still prefer the online option, even though the center has returned to face-to-face appointments. Susan feels that the pandemic actually served as a surprisingly helpful promoter for online tutoring, which has only improved over this past year. Coming back this semester with both a strong in-person and online tutoring force, the Writing Center is getting a solid fresh start. Susan adds, “Filling Star’s shoes is a monumental task because she was such a beloved leader. I learned so much from Star about caring for and advocating for our tutors. They work hard, and we value them.”

Talking about her recent promotion, Susan says, “In many ways the new position is much more difficult than I ever thought it would be, but it is also more rewarding. I have a great team with Assistant Directors Jasilyn Heaps and Kendall Becker, and all the great tutors that work here.” When talking about the tutors, Susan feels so much gratitude. “The tutors each bring their own special talents and skills. We teach and train them, but every tutor has their own strengths that they bring to a tutoring session.” The tutors help students, but the tutors also benefit from the job. Susan says, “This experience helps them become better listeners, communicators, learners, and teachers. We care about our tutors! Here they gain experience that will help them throughout their lives.”

Susan and the assistant directors also help faculty. For example, they have presented at conferences on writing strong assignment descriptions and mentoring students for peer review. Susan notes, “The majority of people who use our center are English 1010 and 2010 students, but we also help faculty, graduate students, English language learners, and students from all fields of study.”

In addition to directing the Writing Center, Susan is a senior lecturer and regularly teaches writing, literature, and American culture classes. She and husband Vaughn can be found renovating their 120-year-old farm house in Cove, Idaho, tending the garden, or hiking with Watson, their yellow lab.

The Writing Center had one more change this year: the creation of a promotional video. Susan wrote the script, and with the help of USU media productions specialist Trent Huntsaker (an English alum), they filmed the new promotional video over the past summer. “When Trent asked about the goals for the video, we said that we wanted it to be fun, friendly, and welcoming. We want to encourage students to come to the center, especially those who might be afraid of writing.” What message does she want people to remember? “Come on in and let’s talk about writing. We’re here to help.”