

Writing Support Services in Foreign Academic Libraries: Practices and Implications (Postprint)

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Date: 2023-04-01T16:15:49+00:00

Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Foreign university libraries have a long history and rich practice in writing tutoring services, and learning from their specific experience can provide guidance for developing similar services in China. [Method/Process] This study employed web-based and literature research methods to select 10 representative foreign university libraries, investigate the current status of their writing tutoring services, and systematically summarize their tutoring practices. [Result/Conclusion] Chinese university libraries can explore practical approaches through establishing writing centers, forming student consulting teams, and organizing diversified writing activities.

Full Text

Writing Tutoring Services in Foreign University Libraries: Practice and Implications

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Abstract: [Purpose/Significance] Writing tutoring services in foreign university libraries have a long history and rich practice. Learning from their concrete experience can provide guidance for developing similar services in China. [Method/Process] Through online investigation and literature review, this paper selected ten representative foreign university libraries to survey the current status of writing tutoring services and systematically summarize their tutoring practices. [Result/Conclusion] Chinese university libraries can conduct practical exploration by establishing writing centers, forming student consulting teams, and carrying out diversified writing activities.

Keywords: foreign university library; writing tutoring; writing center

Classification Number: G251.5

DOI: 10.13266/j.issn.0252-3116.2020.03.015

Writing proficiency is one of the fundamental competencies college students should possess, yet the current writing level of university students is not optimistic. Reports on “poor writing skills among college students” frequently appear [1-4], and multiple surveys [5-7] reveal that students struggle with coursework assignments, graduation theses, research papers, and official document writing. Poor writing quality and lack of interest in writing have become widespread deficiencies among contemporary college students, making the improvement of writing skills an urgent issue that higher education must address. As an important service institution in higher education, university libraries should fully leverage their educational functions, strengthen in-depth research and exploration of writing tutoring services, and thereby better support higher education development and demonstrate their own value.

1. Research and Development Status of Writing Tutoring Services in University Libraries

1.1 Foreign Status

As the leader in information literacy education, university libraries have long provided support for scientific research and academic writing. How to better integrate information literacy with writing instruction is an area that foreign university libraries actively explore. Foreign research primarily focuses on collaboration between libraries and other service providers, including: (1) **Personnel collaboration**, where libraries cooperate with writing centers or faculty to provide writing tutoring. E. Ferer illustrated cooperation models between libraries and writing centers through case studies, such as libraries providing information literacy skills training for writing center staff, joint tutoring, and interactive promotion services [8]. J. White-Farnham et al. introduced a case where librarians were embedded in first-year professional writing courses at the University of Wisconsin-Superior to provide information literacy skills guidance [9]. N. Hoffman et al. redesigned courses to form an embedded collaborative teaching team composed of faculty, librarians, and writing specialists to jointly help students improve research and writing skills [10]. (2) **Space collaboration**, where libraries and partners share space to achieve one-stop writing tutoring services. R. Cook et al. discussed the importance and challenges of locating a writing center within the library at Florida Gulf Coast University [11]. M. Mahaffy compared two approaches—librarians providing consultation services in writing centers versus writing center consultants providing services in libraries—and found the latter more effective [12]. (3) **Data collaboration**, where libraries and writing centers share service data to explore commonalities. S. J. Graves et al. analyzed writing center service records at Texas A&M University to find solutions to information literacy issues during tutoring, thereby exploring the intersection of information literacy education and writing instruction for effective collaboration between libraries and writing centers [13].

1.2 Domestic Status

Domestic literature specifically addressing writing services in university libraries is limited, focusing mainly on introducing foreign cases, surveying writing training lectures, and graduation thesis guidance practices. Pu Hongbin introduced the writing services at Valparaiso University Library [14]; Zhu Yiting et al. investigated learning support services in Japanese university libraries, where writing tutoring is a basic service item [15]; Luo Yijie surveyed the status of academic paper writing training courses in Chinese university libraries and found that thesis writing guidance courses have not received sufficient attention [16]; Huang Xiaoqun discussed library services for undergraduate graduation theses [17]; Liu Ximmeng explored practical guidance for master's degree thesis writing at Shandong University Library [18].

Further investigation of “Double First-Class” university library websites revealed that only Southeast University has a dedicated “Thesis Writing Guidance” section, while Tsinghua University, Peking University, Zhejiang University, Wuhan University and others have “Submission Guidelines.” Most universities offer writing-related services through lecture training, covering literature review writing, reference management software usage, and academic norms.

From the research and practice status at home and abroad, it is evident that both use information literacy as a bridge to provide writing services. The difference lies in that foreign practices combine information literacy with writing content to provide in-depth writing tutoring through collaboration, while domestic practices remain at a relatively superficial level of general information literacy education, with few systematic analyses of foreign university library writing tutoring services. Based on this, this paper systematically summarizes foreign university library writing tutoring practices through literature and online investigation to provide reference and guidance for developing similar services in China.

2. Practice of Writing Tutoring in Foreign University Libraries

This paper searched databases including Emerald Management Xtra, Wiley Online Library, Springer E-journals, and SAGE Premier using keywords “library + writing support,” “library + writing service,” and “library + writing center,” yielding 48 relevant documents. Additionally, through investigation of foreign university library websites using Microsoft Bing (<http://cn.bing.com/>), the paper selected ten universities from the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, and Australia as research objects based on the richness of relevant content and relatively high QS World University Rankings. Based on these literature and online survey results, foreign university library writing tutoring practices can be summarized into four categories: resource navigation tutoring, reference consultation tutoring, embedded course tutoring, and practical activity tutoring.

2.1 Resource Navigation Tutoring

University library websites are portals directly facing faculty and students and important windows for providing information services. The investigated foreign university library websites all have dedicated sections for writing tutoring (see Table 1), characterized by: (1) **Rich resources with strong professionalism**. Section contents include citation and reference formats, grammar and writing skills, online learning tutorials and tests, academic poster production, shared link resources, and academic integrity guidance. Among them, the University of York provides comprehensive writing guides ranging from pre-writing problem analysis to article argumentation, complete with writing templates and checklists to help students better master writing skills [25]. (2) **Detailed classification with precise targeting**. Resources are organized and classified according to different user groups (undergraduates, graduate students, faculty), different disciplines (history, philosophy, etc.), and different writing types (reviews, journal articles, lab reports), providing targeted tutoring materials based on differences.

2.2 Reference Consultation Tutoring

Reference consultation is one of the core services of university libraries. Integrating writing tutoring into reference consultation is the most convenient way to provide this service, with main forms including: (1) **Face-to-face tutoring**, also known as one-on-one writing tutoring, which is a free writing consultation service provided to all faculty and students. Librarians or peer tutors communicate with writers about problems encountered during the writing process, discuss and provide suggestions, aiming to help writers improve their writing skills. The advantage lies in its strong specificity. Writers can make online appointment applications and receive tutoring at the library at designated times after successful booking. For example, Washington University Library's face-to-face consultation can help writers with paper organization, provide draft feedback, and answer questions about discipline-specific or genre-specific writing [19]. (2) **Remote tutoring**, which is less constrained by time and space and can provide writers with more opportunities to communicate with tutors through streamlined procedures, making library tutoring more flexible. Tutors can provide online guidance through chat platforms, and students can also receive guidance via email, though this method is only suitable for cases with limited writing content.

2.3 Embedded Course Tutoring

Relevant research points out that most professional courses do not explicitly teach research and writing skills, yet these skills are increasingly needed inside and outside the classroom, and librarians are often required to teach these contents [10]. Therefore, many university libraries explore guidance through "embedded" approaches. Currently, there are three main embedding methods: (1) **One-shot embedding**, where librarians embed in professional courses and

use a single class session to teach everything students may need to know about research and writing. This approach still focuses on information literacy education and cannot integrate well with the course. E. R. Spievak et al. believe that “one-shot” courses are not the best method for providing information literacy education services [29], but this method still exists because of the common belief that “something is better than nothing” [30]. (2) **Multiple embedding**, which addresses the problems of one-shot tutoring. Indiana University seamlessly integrated library instruction into introductory biology courses, with two librarians collaborating with a biology faculty member to embed information literacy skills multiple times according to course progress, enabling students to comprehensively master research and writing skills [9]. (3) **Deep embedding**, where N. Hoffman et al. invited librarians and professors to collaboratively design first-year courses to better integrate writing skills into course teaching. Ultimately, librarians and writing support staff were fully integrated into the course, not only providing guidance and interacting with students but also participating in course design, teaching, and student assessment, achieving good results [10].

2.4 Practical Activity Tutoring

Improving writing skills has no shortcuts; the only method is to read more, think more, and practice more, while writing is an activity requiring concentration and continuity. Based on this consideration, many foreign university libraries help faculty and students better complete writing through practical activities, mainly in three forms: (1) **Writing spaces**, which provide writers with quiet places where guidance is available and other writers are present, creating an optimal environment for efficient writing. For example, the Australian National University’s “Shut Up and Write” activity uses the Pomodoro Technique, including 25 minutes of silent writing, timed breaks, and chatting. Break time helps solve problems, discuss writing progress, or simply socialize [27]. (2) **Writing groups**, organized and coordinated by librarians or writing peers, provide writers with a low-pressure environment to share ongoing writing tasks and receive feedback at any stage of writing. This helps writers maintain continuous writing motivation, facilitates idea exchange, promotes research, and generates good ideas. (3) **Writing boot camps**, which provide writers with concentrated time for thinking and writing, usually lasting several days, enabling the writing process to proceed quickly and efficiently while cultivating positive writing habits. The University of Guelph provides graduate students with a week-long training program designed to help them complete dissertations and reduce completion time, offering tools and resources while providing opportunities to attend workshops and one-on-one tutoring [23].

3. Characteristics of Foreign University Library Writing Tutoring Practices

3.1 Advantages

3.1.1 Balancing Commonality and Individuality

Foreign practices demonstrate rich website resources with universal applicability, while reasonable information organization and revelation enable more effective utilization of library writing resources. Through library websites, establishing resource navigation links such as “writing services” or “writing support” can build a network platform for communication between libraries and writers. Additionally, one-on-one tutoring can provide targeted personalized guidance for specific problems writers encounter during the writing process, serving as a powerful supplement to resource navigation services.

3.1.2 Combining Theory and Practice

Foreign university library writing tutoring models are diversified with broad audiences. They include both theoretical instruction on information literacy and writing knowledge, as well as diverse and interesting writing practice activities such as “writing spaces” and “boot camps” to help students improve their skills. Through practical activities, students can not only deepen their understanding of writing theory but also learn through enjoyable activities that mobilize their writing enthusiasm and creativity, truly enhancing their writing abilities [27].

3.1.3 Integrating into the Entire Scientific Research Process

Foreign university libraries provide comprehensive writing tutoring services throughout the entire research process, from literature needs and problem analysis before writing, to writing plan formulation, paper structure organization, article argumentation, and academic ethics norms, making research and writing guidance fully integrated to truly achieve the goal of helping students succeed and improve relevant skills.

3.1.4 Providing In-Depth Writing Tutoring

Through deep cooperation with faculty, libraries better integrate writing tutoring into professional teaching, strengthening interaction with students, shortening the distance with them, enhancing professionalism, and meeting students’ specialized needs. At the same time, this transforms librarians’ roles from external resource providers to members of the teaching team, enabling them to better guide students through various stages of research tasks and achieve perfect integration of research and writing support with course content.

3.2 Disadvantages

- (1) Most foreign university library writing tutoring is conducted jointly with writing centers. As two independent entities, collaboration between libraries and writing centers requires personnel, time, and resources to maintain. The primary issue facing multi-entity collaborative services is determining which party should serve as the primary responsible or

leading entity. Additionally, services provided by the two entities have redundancy, making it difficult to distinguish which specific content knowledge is “owned” by different subjects. Although successful collaborative practices have achieved one-stop space integration, true one-stop service integration has not yet been realized.

- (2) Evaluation of tutoring effectiveness needs strengthening. Whether tutoring is conducted independently by libraries or in cooperation with other institutions, the following aspects should be considered: How to improve the quality of students’ academic papers? What impact does it have on their overall average grades? What is the correlation with student success? Although many case evaluations exist [31-32], they are all conducted for specific individual cases, and large-scale evaluations to verify tutoring effectiveness are still lacking.

4. Implications for Chinese University Libraries

Writing tutoring has always been a regular service in Chinese university libraries, but its depth and breadth lag far behind foreign comprehensive writing tutoring services. Existing problems include: (1) relatively scarce writing resources, with few writing resource navigations on library websites; (2) lack of innovative service models, mainly relying on traditional lecture training; (3) insufficiently in-depth service content, not delving into specific writing content, with embedded teaching services focusing only on information literacy education without fully combining research, writing guidance, and practice; (4) relatively single service providers, mostly librarians, lacking multi-party cooperation, especially deep cooperation with professional faculty, and failing to effectively utilize student resources for peer tutoring. Addressing these existing problems, we can learn from foreign practices and, combined with our own characteristics, provide comprehensive writing tutoring services.

4.1 Establishing Writing Centers in University Libraries as Entities

University libraries have always been learning centers, cultural centers, and communication centers in universities. Many foreign universities locate writing centers within libraries, demonstrating that libraries are ideal venues for writing tutoring. Having libraries take the lead in establishing writing centers can solve many problems arising from libraries and writing centers being separate entities. Libraries can cooperate with academic affairs departments, schools, and faculty to fully utilize various teaching resources, offer general writing courses, and hire professional faculty as part-time writing center tutors to guide students. Writing centers can create hardware and software conditions and environments related to courses, provide relevant information consultation services and tutoring, and coordinate various writing-related activities. Using libraries as a “medium,” they can achieve shared space, common information, and joint course delivery. For instance, we can learn from the advantages of foreign university library

website resource navigation by adding dedicated “writing support” service sections to integrate writing-related resources and information, enriching writing resources to achieve reorganization of writing tutoring resources and services.

4.2 Forming Student Teams with Peer Tutors as Supplements

Due to limited library personnel, we should fully learn from the foreign peer tutoring model, establish student consulting teams, and select outstanding undergraduates or graduate students with strong writing skills, good communication abilities, and willingness to help others as peer tutors to provide consultation services. Practice shows that peer tutoring is very popular among students [33]. Students can receive detailed feedback from writing peers during writing, which not only improves paper quality but also makes peer tutors better writers. Y. Xiao’s experimental comparison found that students who became peer tutors achieved better writing scores than others [34]. To better prepare peer tutors for consultation work, libraries need to provide training and guidance, establish assessment systems for supervision to ensure good service quality, and provide certain financial support to better stimulate their service enthusiasm.

4.3 Planning Practical Activities with “Three Combinations” as the Entry Point

4.3.1 Combining with Reading Promotion

University libraries’ reading promotion work has gradually demonstrated effectiveness after years of accumulation. Reading is the foundation of writing, and writing is the extension of reading; reading ability and writing ability complement each other. Therefore, university libraries can closely integrate reading promotion and writing practice, permeating writing practice activities in reading promotion, supporting writing through reading, and extending reading promotion through writing practice. This allows students to experience the entire process from reading to writing, achieving simultaneous improvement of reading and writing abilities. For example, using methods like the “Pomodoro Technique” to conduct lively writing activities [27]; libraries can also organize essay competitions through reading activities, selecting excellent works for publication as encouragement.

4.3.2 Combining with Information Literacy Education and Training

Information literacy and writing ability are essential basic qualities in the research process. When providing writing guidance, foreign university libraries cooperate with librarians for training, such as Harvard University’s “Research Paper Clinics” project where librarians and writing program instructors jointly conduct writing tutoring training [35]. We can also learn from the “Writing Week” activity held by the University of York Library, which was developed in cooperation with the writing center and English teaching center, combining information literacy and writing practice and receiving enthusiastic student response [36]. Therefore, librarians can plan and organize practical training activities such as “writing workshops” and “writing boot camps” to integrate

information literacy and writing guidance, providing “one-stop” guidance for college students’ research work from literature collection, article conception, and argumentation to final writing completion. Of course, this also places higher demands on librarians’ capabilities.

4.3.3 Combining with Professional Courses

Foreign students who participated in embedded course tutoring reported through surveys that they became more confident in research and writing skills through course learning [10]. We can learn from foreign embedded tutoring course models by integrating writing guidance into professional courses with writing assignments. According to different course teaching requirements, librarians and instructors can jointly conduct course discussions, design embedded writing guidance content and methods based on instructors’ specific requirements, and assist instructors in revising and guiding students’ writing assignments through course tracking, after-class consultation, and training, serving as consolidation and supplement to embedded classroom teaching. By continuously enriching and improving embedded teaching and after-class tutoring content, a systematic embedded writing teaching system can be gradually formed. Given that freshmen are more malleable, first-year professional introductory courses can be used as pilots to consciously strengthen students’ writing ability cultivation from the first year, with progressively deeper embedded writing tutoring from sophomore and junior years to graduate school, expanding the breadth and depth of library writing services.

4.4 Constructing Evaluation Systems with Multi-Dimensional Assessment as the Guide

To test the effectiveness of writing tutoring, a comprehensive evaluation system needs to be established. Sound rules and regulations should be formulated, with libraries, schools, and academic affairs departments jointly developing position task statements for unified annual assessment by the university. A complete data preservation mechanism should be established to continuously track students receiving tutoring, including their course grades, graduation thesis quality, and employment status. The rational application of multiple indicators should be explored to construct an evaluation system for the effectiveness of university library writing tutoring services based on university assessments, student evaluations, and employer feedback data, thereby assessing the correlation between writing tutoring and student success and promoting continuous improvement of writing tutoring service quality.

In summary, university libraries have always aimed to meet reader needs and actively explore expanding service areas and innovating service content. By taking the lead in establishing writing centers, coordinating participation from various schools to build writing exchange platforms, forming consulting teams, conducting rich writing practice activities, and constructing reasonable and effective evaluation systems, libraries can promote the comprehensive improvement of students’ humanistic literacy, truly becoming students’ second classroom for

acquiring knowledge and improving writing abilities, thereby better serving university teaching and research.

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Chen Xiaohong: Revised the paper;

Li Ying: Collected materials and revised the paper;

Liu Yun: Collected materials and revised the paper.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.