

# Academic Success Center Handbook

## Alfaisal University



Written and compiled by

Emily Wilson, Ph.D.

Director of the Academic Success Center

Alfaisal University

## Internet Links

The Academic Success Center website: <https://asc.alfaisal.edu>

Registering and making appointments: <http://alfaisal.mywconline.com>

ASC email: [ascenter@alfaisal.edu](mailto:ascenter@alfaisal.edu)

Location: Alfaisal University Library.

## Table of Contents

<b><i>Internet Links</i></b>	2
<b><i>What is the Academic Success Center? An Overview</i></b>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<b>Vision</b>	4
<b>Mission</b>	4
<b>Objectives</b>	4
<b>Academic principles</b>	5
<b><i>Policies and Procedures</i></b>	5
<b><i>Audience and Services</i></b>	8
<b>Student services</b>	8
<b>A typical session</b>	10
<b>Future services</b>	12
<b><i>Organization and Administration of the Academic Success Center</i></b>	13
<b>Organizational Structure</b>	13
<b>Location and hours</b>	13
<b>Personnel</b>	14
The Director	14
Mathematics & Science Instructor	15
The Student Consultants	16
Finance Department	17
<b>Reports and records</b>	17
Confidentiality	17
Research	18

## What is the Academic Success Center? An Overview

The Academic Success Center at Alfaisal University is a space where members of our community can find help understanding concepts, developing skills, and growing as lifelong learners. The Center primarily exists to extend and support the work of Alfaisal's classes by offering individual or small group consultation sessions, in which learners are paired with trained student consultants who provide academic support for specific classes.

### Vision

To establish and sustain a thriving teaching-learning-writing community that is aligned with Alfaisal University's mission to give students opportunities to develop their full potential.

### Mission

We guide students to develop as independent learners so that they experience increasing confidence and success in their academic journeys.

### Objectives

The following objectives will help develop the kind of learning community that is in line with our vision:

- Providing high-quality, targeted consultation sessions and workshops that support students' writing and learning processes. This support goes beyond the specific assignment or concept to help students develop as independent learners.
- Maintaining a high-quality professional development program for each rotation of student consultants so that they can quickly assess learners' needs and provide appropriately leveled support.
- Providing the physical and digital resources necessary to support the Center's seamless operation and the students' academic success.
- Partnering with deans and faculty from every college in the university to assess student needs and develop a strategy for meeting those needs.
- Enhancing instruction in various courses by implementing a writing-to-learn program.

### Academic principles

- Valuing inquiry-based and discovery-based instruction over more didactic or lecture-based teaching methods.
- Providing instruction within the zone of proximal development so that learners can reach information and pull themselves to the next level.
- Treating writing as both a process and a product, and supporting the process.
- Establishing clear claims in papers, supporting them with appropriate evidence, and providing analysis that links the evidence with the claim.
- Affirming complete academic honesty.

## Policies and Procedures

The Academic Success Center is designed to provide individual consultations to students at Alfaisal University who seek assistance with learning a concept, completing an assignment, or preparing for an assessment in a supported class. The Center's role is to help students succeed as independent writers and learners. Our consultants will:

- Ask questions to assess students' current level of understanding
- Ask questions that help students problem-solve
- Ask questions designed to help students figure out what they are trying to say
- Suggest strategies for an approach
- Model strategies or methods (including modeling editing, proofreading, etc.)
- Briefly review key concepts necessary for success
- Explain or reinforce difficult material by breaking down difficult concepts
- Suggest resources for further study

Because our goal is to empower students to become independent learners, our consultants will not:

- Do any work for the student. This includes writing, revising, or editing any portion of a student's paper or completing any part of an assignment for the student. Such action would be counterproductive by making the student more dependent on the Center and potentially dishonest by confusing the consultant's work with the student's work.
- Teach new course material. The Center's work is designed to support, rather than replace, the teaching happening in classrooms.

- Go through an entire paper in one sitting (usually). Instead, consultants go through key pieces of writing assignments and provide strategies that students can apply on their own.

In order to ensure that we are able to serve our whole community fairly, we adhere to the following policies:

- Appointments must be booked online through the Academic Success Center's website.
- Consultation appointments are for a maximum of 60 minutes, and they can be booked any time a student consultant is available between 10:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m. Appointment slots are available in 30-minute increments, so students may book 2 consecutive appointments.
- A student may book up to TWO appointments per day (1 hour max) and up to FOUR appointments per week (2 hours max).
- Students who do not keep their appointments may be placed on a warning list. Students who do not show up for appointments 2 times in a semester may not use the Center for the rest of the semester.
- Students who know that they will miss an appointment should cancel it in the scheduling system as early as possible, at least 24 hours in advance. Cancelling less than 2 hours prior to the scheduled appointment may mean that the student is marked as a no-show.
- Students should make every effort to arrive on time for face-to-face meetings and log in a couple of minutes early for online sessions. If a student is more than 10 minutes late

for a consultation, the consultant is not obligated to keep the appointment and may mark the student as a no-show.

- Students may email the consultant *in advance* to request a group tutoring session if multiple students are struggling with the same assignment. The number of students will then be noted on the client report form that the consultant completes after the session. Group sessions are limited to 3 students maximum.

## Audience and Services

The Academic Success Center exists to support the entire Alfaisal learning community. While the Center's first year has been focused primarily on supporting undergraduate work through tutoring sessions, we are expanding to support courses through a writing-to-learn program and to support graduate students through workshops.

### Student services

- One-on-one consultation sessions with a trained student consultant. These sessions may take place in person (at the Academic Success Center), or online, through the video chat option available through our scheduling software. Students can book appointments for help with understanding concepts and completing assignments in the following classes:

Anatomy & Physiology

Biochemistry

Chemistry (including Organic Chemistry)

Electrical Engineering (EE207)

Economics



English (101, 112, 102, 113, 222, 224)

Mathematics (pre-calculus, Calculus I, Calculus II, Linear Algebra, Differential Equations)

Molecular medicine

Physics

Software Engineering (SE100)

- Students may also book appointments for help with writing. Writing support services aim to assist students at any phase of the writing process, including:
  - Brainstorming topic ideas
  - Organizing thoughts (outlining, reverse outlining, choosing idea sequence, etc.)
  - Developing supporting ideas
  - Conducting research on the topic
    - Finding relevant and trustworthy sources
    - Synthesizing ideas from sources
    - Citing sources properly
  - Learning strategies for revising and editing
  - Help with identifying patterns of grammatical errors and engagement directed learning activities intended to improve grammar. We recommend that students bring specific grammar questions rather than blanket questions. It's better to ask questions like "How can I avoid run-on sentences in my writing?" as opposed to "Is all of the grammar in this paper correct?" Student consultants are instructed not to edit or proofread papers, but to help writers learn how to edit and proofread their own papers.

- Student consultants are also trained to ask questions to help students improve papers for themselves and to offer feedback on the student's ideas. The assignment must not be improved beyond the ability of the student-writer.

### A typical session

Each consultation session lasts for 30 minutes. If the student has a challenging issue that requires more time, he or she may sign up for 2 consecutive time slots with the same consultant, if 2 consecutive slots are available. The consultants are instructed to keep strictly to the allotted time by setting a timer, and session times typically cannot be extended.

#### 1. An introductory interview

The consultant will begin the session by asking the student a series of questions that may include:

- The particular instructions for the problem set or assignment (it is helpful if students either bring the assignment with them or attach the appropriate file to the appointment request).
- The student's goal for the consultation session.
- The particular challenges the student is facing in understanding the content or completing the assignment.
- Questions the student has about the content or assignment.

#### 2. Formative assessment with targeted instruction

- The consultant’s strategies in this middle portion of the session will depend on the kind of assignment or problem for which the student is seeking help.
- The consultant will ask the student a series of questions designed to assess what the student currently understands.
- The consultant will provide targeted bursts of instruction: not lectures or lengthy explanations, but small bits of information (mini-lessons) designed to help the student get to the next level.
- The consultant will follow each mini-lesson with questions designed to check for understanding.
- Students may also see consultants engage in:
  - Modeling: the consultant demonstrates how to solve a similar problem and uses a “think-aloud” protocol, stating their thought processes out loud for the learner
  - Guided practice: having the student solve a problem, but talking them through the steps and filling in the gaps where necessary
  - Independent application: having the student solve the problem independently and then discussing how the student solved the problem and could apply their new understanding to future problems.

### 3. Discussion and wrap-up

- The student and consultant will discuss the student’s next steps—a writing plan for the next draft of the paper, or perhaps a section of the textbook to re-read, or a problem set to solve with the new knowledge or skills gained in the session.

- They may revisit the session goals to see whether or not those goals were achieved.
- They may decide to schedule another session.

Consultants are trained to assist in the process of inquiry and to rely heavily on questions paired with targeted, brief instruction. Students can expect to work together with the consultant toward a shared goal. If students are bringing writing for feedback, they are strongly encouraged to bring the assignment prompt also. The student will be in control of the paper during the whole session. Consultants are encouraged not to suggest wording or to write anything on the student's paper; *it is important that papers not be improved beyond the writer's ability.*

The session will end with a review of what was covered and suggestions for next steps. At this point, students may decide whether or not to book another appointment for further feedback or instruction. The consultant will complete a Client Report Form and the student will be asked to complete an anonymous survey (both forms are available through the scheduling system).

### Writing to Learn Program

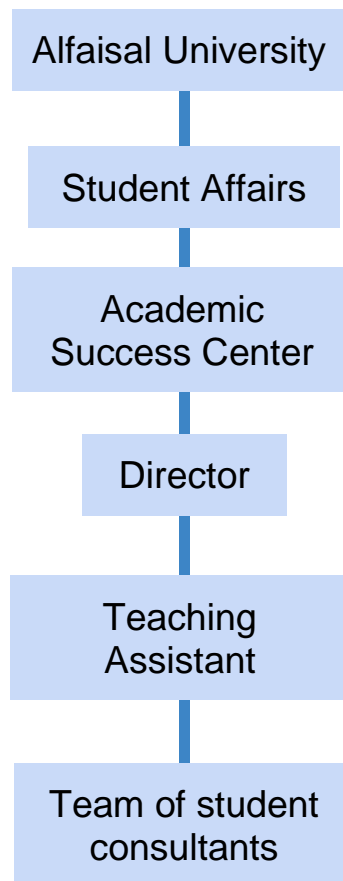
In Spring 2021, the Academic Success Center piloted a writing-to-learn (WTL) program in one course (organic chemistry). In fall 2021, the program will expand to support writing in more courses. This is what is involved in the writing to learn program:

- The director meets with deans and faculty to identify courses that could most benefit from the WTL program.
- The director identifies, recruits, and hires students to work as writing fellows in the course as well as English consultants for the Academic Success Center. The number of writing fellows needed is dependent on the size of the class.

- The director meets with the faculty member and writing fellows, and they collaboratively create a writing prompt and a rubric built around some of the most crucial and foundational concepts in the course.
- The director meets again with faculty and fellows to grade several essays and establish norms for grading via the rubric.

## Organization and Administration of the Academic Success Center

### Organizational Structure



### Location and hours

The ASC is housed in the Alfaisal Library. There are two rooms in the Center: one on the men's side of the library, and one on the women's side (both on the third floor).

The ASC operates during the fall and spring semesters annually. Students may book appointments with student consultants during any available 30-60 minute period between **10:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m., Sunday-Thursday.**

## Personnel

### The Director

The Academic Success Center is led by the Director who oversees training of student consultants, supervises operations of the Center, and strategizes for the Center's future. The Director should have specific training in pedagogy so that s/he may teach the student consultants how to implement highly effective instructional practices and should have expertise in writing in order to lead workshops and direct the writing-to-learn program. The Director's responsibilities include:

- Recruiting and hiring excellent student consultants
- Providing training for student consultants regarding highly effective instructional practices as well as formative assessment strategies
- Overseeing and providing strategies for the Center's daily operations
- Writing and regularly updating the ASC handbook
- Creating the Center's policies and procedures
- Developing and implementing a marketing plan to make students aware of the Center's services
- Responding to faculty inquiries
- Using feedback from the students and student consultants to improve the quality and range of services provided by the Center

- Collecting data about the Center and generating reports to deliver to upper administration
- Observing English tutoring sessions regularly and providing consultants with feedback
- Mapping out a long-term plan for the Center, including planning future workshops, research projects, and initiatives
- Implementing the writing-to-learn program in partnership with Alfaisal faculty.  
Overseeing/managing the team of writing fellows (student consultants at the ASC, whose job is to support writing in the WTL courses)
- Holding writing workshops for graduate students who are working on proposals and theses

#### Teaching Assistant

This staff member holds regular tutoring sessions with students and also oversees aspects of the day-to-day administration and operations of the Center. This person needs a strong background in math and science, as well as experience with tutoring. S/he needs to be highly organized and capable of handling administrative details. The math & science instructor's responsibilities include:

- Regularly holding math and science tutoring sessions with students
- Observing student consultants' math/science sessions regularly and providing feedback
- Maintaining the scheduling software, both for students and for student consultants, notifying the software company when there are problems or glitches in the system
- Supervising the Center's daily operations

- Responding to student inquiries
- Instructing student consultants regarding all relevant aspects of the scheduling software
- Creating and regularly updating website content, including resources, marketing materials, and instructional videos

### The Student Consultants

All student consultants have earned an A in the courses for which they provide assistance, and they undergo a vetting process as well as a training module before beginning their work as consultants for the Center.

The student consultants' responsibilities include:

- Updating their availability in the scheduling system on a weekly basis (prior to 5 p.m. on the Saturday before each week begins), and updating the system with any schedule changes ASAP
- Arriving punctually at the beginning of each session (if face-to-face), or logging into the system ahead of the scheduled time (if online)
- Providing a high-quality 30-60 minute consultation session
- Immediately informing the math/science instructor via both email and WhatsApp message if unable to attend a scheduled session so that s/he may be able to find a substitute
- Reviewing the student's documents in advance of the session
- Ensuring that there is progress made toward the student's goals and making the student feel empowered to learn and grow in the subject
- Completing a client report form after each appointment OR marking no-shows



- Engaging in 5 professional development modules over the course of the semester designed to help consultants reflect upon and improve their sessions
- Meeting with the Director or math/science instructor following each observation for feedback and reflection
- In future semesters, assuming leadership roles in training and mentoring new consultants

### Finance Department

The finance department is responsible for handling payment of student consultants, who will submit their timesheets to Mr. Abdulmalek Almufarej in finance.

### Reports and records

The Academic Success Center maintains a record of the number of appointments, students' majors/departments, the focus of each client's session (the classes for which students are seeking assistance), the duration of each session, and data collected via the anonymous feedback forms. The Center will not track the names of clients unless they are no-shows. Then at the end of the semester, names of clients who are no-shows will be deleted.

### Confidentiality

All appointments at the Academic Success Center are treated as confidential. In reflection sessions during training modules, consultants will be asked to share descriptions of sessions with all identifying details removed so that they maintain students' privacy. These reflections are necessary to improve the consultants' practice.

## Research

The ASC welcomes Alfaisal University faculty who wish to conduct research about the Center, with a limit of 2 ongoing research projects per semester. All projects must be approved by the Alfaisal University's Institutional Review Board as well as the Director of the Center.

## Policy Regarding Recruitment and Hiring of Student Consultants

Academic Success Center personnel will coordinate with Student Affairs to evaluate student enrollment and achievement across courses in the university. The Director of the Center and the Dean of Student Affairs will determine which courses necessitate hiring student tutors. The factors to be considered include the following:

- Courses are required to be taken by students across multiple colleges
- Courses have a high enrollment
- Courses have a high rate of student failure

Based on this evaluation, the director will identify high-performing students in these courses and will send them a link to an online application form. The students who are interested in working at the Center and who fill out the form will then undergo at least one interview. Following a round of interviews, the director will select the student or students best suited for the position and will conduct training in the Center's policies as well as best practices in tutoring.