Working with your Writing Fellow: A Guide for Faculty Partners
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Writing Fellows programs are designed to be meaningful opportunities for collaboration between faculty and students in courses where writing is either the primary topic of instruction or mode of assessment. We aim to build a more positive, effective, and supportive experience of academic writing that makes intentional use of differentiated instruction according to academic discipline. The Writing Fellows program is an educational program, in which all participants—faculty, writing fellows, and students—stand to benefit. Your job as the faculty partner is to set explicit expectations for your WF and help them understand how your collaboration can maximize the benefits for all involved. This manual is meant to set guidelines and parameters for articulating and clarifying those expectations.

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1. What are Writing Fellows?

Writing Fellows (WFs) can serve a number of roles in individual courses in which they are embedded, but they are intended to serve a couple of specific programmatic purposes. First, and most importantly, WFs are representatives of the Writing Center, which supports students by providing concrete strategies for intentional participation in writing as a process. WFs are embedded in specific courses to extend the Writing Center’s support directly to every student with the goal of challenging strong writers and helping struggling writers gain confidence. WFs also collaborate with faculty in developing and/or improving writing instruction, assignments, scaffolds, and rubrics. Finally, WFs can serve as intermediaries between faculty and students, helping professors better understand where students are struggling and assisting students in understanding the expectations of faculty.

WFs are not merely “tutors” who assist students whose writing is “poor,” although this may be the case for some of your students. Instead, they help students understand and adjust to the expectations of higher education as a culture, identify entry points for their discourse communities, and articulate their emerging sense of expertise in a field. Importantly, WFs serve to model the kind of collaborative revision work required of professional and academic writers that many published authors take for granted.

2. What can Writing Fellows do?

Writing Fellows cannot grade papers, and faculty partners should not ask them to do anything that violates FERPA standards for student privacy. However, there is a lot you can do to tailor your collaboration with a Writing Fellow in the way that best serves your students and suits your unique needs. The options below are common in Writing Fellows programs across the country; if you would like to discuss additional options, please request a meeting with the Assistant Director for Faculty Outreach.

a. **Attend class:** WFs get paid to attend and observe your class. This is particularly useful on days when you introduce and explain important disciplinary concepts and writing assignments. Assume that your WF will attend every class meeting unless you tell them otherwise.

b. **Consult with student writers:** The WF’s primary function is to consult with students, one-on-one or in groups, on drafts of their writing. Your students should meet with the WF about once every two weeks to get the most benefit. In a consultation, the WF and student discuss the student’s writing process, the strengths and weaknesses of a draft, and specific techniques and strategies for developing or revising the draft. Faculty should strive to normalize this work as part of writing in academic and professional contexts. Consultations can happen during class, in the Writing Center, or online (with faculty approval). See “What is a consultation?”

c. **Facilitate workshops/direct instruction:** WFs can spend time in class facilitating peer response workshops or providing direct instruction on topics related to writing. If you would like your WF to provide instruction on a specific topic, the program coordinator
will work with you to provide them with mentoring and support for that work. You will make sure your WF understands the disciplinary context around the topic in question, and the program coordinator will help them develop effective teaching materials.

d. **Mediate between faculty and students:** Students will be coming to your WF with questions about assignments and working with WFs on drafts, which means that WFs will be well-positioned to let you know what your students do and do not understand and where they are struggling with their writing. When your WF raises an issue with you, it creates an opportunity to adjust your pedagogy or provide additional instruction in areas where students are struggling. Faculty partners will receive regular feedback from their WFs via the program coordinator, but you can also arrange for regular meetings with your WF to discuss concerns and/or plan for class meetings.

e. **Provide a student perspective:** Since WFs are members of your intended audience for documents such as syllabi and writing assignment prompts, it can be helpful to get their feedback! Doing so will help you clarify your expectations and anticipate student questions.

3. **Who can have a Writing Fellow?**

Writing Fellow partnerships are prioritized for those who teach TSEM, Advanced Writing Seminar in any discipline, capstone writing courses in any undergraduate major, or any graduate-level courses that require writing. However, any courses requiring at least two revised writing assignments would be good candidates for a Writing Fellow.

The best Faculty Partners (FPs) are those who wish to collaborate with students to create a student-centered, democratic, and supportive space for practicing writing. Meaningful collaboration between faculty and students can create a more inclusive campus culture in which students feel mentored and supported as disciplinary novices.

4. **What is a consultation?**

Many students and faculty have the mistaken perception that a writing consultation is about “fixing” papers—identifying all of the “errors” in a draft and polishing them away. There are three big problems with this perception: 1) it masks the writing process, which moves from drafting to revision and then editing, often in a non-linear and recursive manner; 2) it aligns good writing with eliminating errors, particularly those errors associated with “Standard” American English; and 3) most students neither learn nor benefit from someone else correcting their mistakes. However, it is also unrealistic; writing is an art and a practice, and there is no easy answer or quick fix for mastering it. Writers improve only with time and relevant feedback. Because of this misperception, some students and faculty believe that only “struggling” writers—particularly those who struggle with surface-level errors—can benefit from a writing consultation.
It may be important for you to address this misperception with your students and explain what really happens at the Writing Center. Writing consultations are discussion-based and collaborative, and they can occur at any stage in the writing process. Typically, students request consultations when they have completed a rough draft, but a writing consultation can also provide students with opportunities to clarify a topic and find a focus, develop reading strategies that contribute to a better understanding of source materials, discuss and develop ideas or arguments, or integrate quotations and paraphrase effectively. All of this work can happen at any stage or level of completion, and faculty should encourage students to schedule consultations whenever writers feel stuck in order to keep moving forward and make the best use of available time.

In a consultation, the writing consultant responds to a text-in-progress as an interested reader, asking questions of the writer and noting areas where the writing is unclear or underdeveloped. The goal of a consultation is to encourage the writer by noting strengths, to make the writer more aware of writing as a process, and to offer concrete strategies the writer can employ to improve writing now and in the future. Due to the nature of the writing process, a consultation will prioritize global concerns, such as purpose, audience, focus, organization, and source integration before moving into any discussion of sentence-level, or local, concerns. This can sometimes mean that writing appears to get “messier” as the process unfolds. Encourage your student writers to be patient and trust the process. A student who struggles with writing may require several consultations in order to see demonstrated improvement in writing quality.

You can facilitate a conversation about the goals of writing consultations by sharing your own writing process, explaining which part in that process you like to get feedback from a trusted reader, and inviting your students and WF to do the same. This “normalizing” of the writing process will encourage all students to make better choices about how they engage in academic writing and create more opportunities for all students to submit their best written work.

5. **What is the Faculty Partner’s role?**

   a. **Valuing the Writing Process:** FPs attend to and provide explicit instruction in writing as a process. Specifically, FPs should dedicate class time to discussing and practicing writing moves and revision strategies. In the most effective partnerships, the FP designs the class and adapts assignments to support students’ writing process, building in time between the due dates for visits with the WF. The way you talk to students about writing will impart your values, so please be sure to stress 1) the importance of drafting and revision, 2) thoughtful engagement in low-stakes writing and other scaffolds, 3) the usefulness of feedback from an interested reader—especially before the final draft is due, and 4) reserving time to edit and proofread at the end of the writing process. Whenever possible, try to give students opportunities to revise graded work for credit and avoid commenting on sentence-level errors before the final draft of a project.

   b. **Setting clear expectations:** Before the semester begins, the program coordinator will set up a community meeting for FPs and WFs to discuss the goals of the program. At this meeting, there will be time for FPs to share specific expectations and articulate learning outcomes for the semester. You’ll want to make sure your WF has a schedule of meetings
and knows when to attend class. If you expect your WF to provide direct instruction at some point during the semester, you should give them the topics and dates at the first meeting (or as soon as possible). You’ll want to come to this meeting prepared with a list of qualities that you identify as characteristics of “good writing” in your discipline, so you and your WF can have a conversation about orienting students toward these qualities as one goal for the semester.

c. Submitting course materials for consultation: At our pre-semester meeting, please be sure to bring your syllabus and writing assignments for WF feedback. The WF will read your materials from the perspective of a student in your class, and provide specific questions about clarifying the purpose of your course documents, scaffolding difficult assignments, and building instruction around disciplinary thresholds and writing conventions. If you have never worked with your WF before, you will want to foreground this discussion with some ice-breakers, making sure the WF understands that you would like genuine suggestions for improving your course materials. Keep in mind that students do not immediately feel comfortable engaging with faculty in this way. Demonstrate that you value your WF’s perspective as a student and that you trust them to provide useful feedback.

d. Mentoring Writing Fellows on disciplinary ways of knowing: Your WF needs to know how knowledge is constructed in your field, what counts as evidence, and what perspectives or ways of knowing are valued. Discussions imparting this kind of knowledge might center around typical genres produced in your field or what types of sources are used to support an argument. Consider discussing scholarly identity in your field and how it tends to be conveyed through specific elements of a text, such as organization, topic, tone, etc. Keep in mind that “good writing” varies from one discipline to another, and your WF needs to understand what it means to you and other practitioners in your field.

e. Assessing the program: We require FPs to administer a short survey to students at the beginning and end of the term, which can be done in class.

6. Introducing the program to your students

The way that you introduce the program to your students on the first day of class will influence your students’ responses to it. This will be the first time that most of your students will work with WFs and perhaps even with the Writing Center; therefore, some may see it as “extra work” rather than as a special opportunity to enhance their writing skills. So explain to your students why you chose to embed a WF; let them know that you see revision as a crucial part of all writing, that you believe in the value of collaborative learning, and that you support the work that the WFs are doing. You may wish to point out to your students that all experienced writers (including you) show their writing to trusted colleagues, peer-reviewers of academic journals, or book editors, and that learning to revise collaboratively is an important outcome of your course that will serve them well in the professional world. Stress that working with a WF is not a task for “poor” or “remedial” writers, but for any student who wants to develop new
skills and improve their confidence with writing. Since the WFs do not take your course and will not necessarily know the course content, you may also want to discuss some of the benefits of showing your work to an educated "lay" reader, such as making writing clearer and more convincing. Lastly, please explain to your students that WFs are not TAs: they do not help with course content or grade papers, but you are free to decide how WF visits will factor into the course grade.

Saying these things just once may not be enough. Reinforcing them at regular intervals—when you discuss paper assignments and your goals for those assignments—will set a positive tone and enable the WFs to work more effectively with your students. It is also important that you mention the WF on your syllabus. Explain who the WF is and the role they will play in your class. Here, too, emphasize the importance of revision in your class and in academic and professional writing.

7. Communicating with Writing Fellows

Please plan to communicate with your WFs regularly during the semester. Expect the following interactions:

- A community meeting before the semester begins, to get to know your WF, establish learning outcomes and expectations, explain your course and writing assignments, and schedule a time for the WF to introduce themselves your class.

- A meeting midway through the semester to identify major areas of concern in student writing generally and discuss ways to adjust pedagogy or add instruction to address these concerns. You can request that the Assistant Director for Faculty Outreach be present at this meeting if you wish.

- Bi-weekly feedback from the WF communicated via the program coordinator.

8. Encouraging engagement with Writing Fellows.

Despite the required visits to the WF, some students may be reluctant to engage with the WF for a number of reasons, so faculty may need to take additional steps to provide platforms for engagement. Here are some suggestions that have worked in the past:

- **Allow students to “meet” with their WF online.** After an initial face-to-face meeting with a WF, online visits can be just as productive and collaborative as face-to-face meetings. They also provide a helpful online record of what was covered in a session.

- **Make a Bb discussion forum for Writing Questions.** This provides students with an accessible venue for asking questions that doesn’t require them to make a trip to the Writing Center or schedule additional time for a meeting. WFs need to be administratively added to your Bb course to employ this option.
c. **Attach points to WF visits.** If visiting the WF is worth 5-10 points of a major assignment, students will see they cannot earn full credit without making use of the WF. Sometimes students need a little push.

d. **Embed your WF into your in-class draft review.** Invite your WF to provide brief but detailed feedback to student writers during in-class draft review. This allows the students to get comfortable with the WF.

e. **Make an early semester deadline for your students’ first visit.** Ensure that all students have at least one brief visit during the first 3 weeks of class. This can be a rapport-building meeting or a writing confidence assessment meeting. In other words, students do not need to have completed a significant writing assignment to meet with the WF.

f. **Ask your WF to share their own writing with your students.** Sharing writing is a vulnerable thing, so this can really endear the WF to your students and help develop relationships. It can also be very productive to give students models of the genre that you expect them to perform. Ideally, you can ask the WF to provide annotations or rhetorical analysis of the sample assignment.

g. **Require students to write mid-term “writing progress” emails to their WFs requesting specific suggestions and feedback.** After the first major assignment has been returned with professor feedback, students write a 2-3 paragraph reflection addressed to the WF explaining their writing strengths and weaknesses, and the WF responds with a targeted strategy and individualized suggestions for developing strengths and avoiding weaknesses.

9. **Tracking contact hours**

WFs will track their contact hours with your students using a roster and spreadsheet, noting the date, mode of interaction, length of meeting time, and subject of each student interaction. The sheet will be set up to automatically compute the total number of minutes your WF spends with each individual student, as well as how much time the WF spends with your class as a whole over the course of the semester. If you require your WF to collect any additional data from their interactions with your students, please specify this at your initial pre-semester meeting.

10. **Thanking your Writing Fellows**

We hope that you will consider doing something at the end of the semester to show your Writing Fellows your appreciation for their work in your course. Consider taking your WF out for coffee or lunch to show your appreciation. They work very hard for you, and even something as simple as a short personal note means a great deal to them.

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