

WRITING FELLOWS  
Program  
2023-2024

A Handbook  
for Faculty and Fellows

## **Welcome!**

*The purpose of this handbook is to provide Writing fellows and faculty with the philosophy and goals of our Writing Fellows Program through the University of Delaware Writing Center. This handbook is a result of what we have learned about successfully working with writing fellows. It outlines program details and helps explain how to effectively use writing fellows in your course. You will learn our philosophy, goals, and some logistical details to help you plan for working with a fellow.*

*If you are a participating fellow or faculty member, thank you for your involvement and contributions. I welcome your suggestions and comments as we develop this program, which serves students in writing-intensive courses across the disciplines.*

*If you have any questions about the program, please feel free to contact the Writing Center Director.*

*Thanks again. We look forward to working with you.*

“My WF came to every class. During and after my lessons, she circulated around the room to answer students’ questions and help them with their assignments. She was great with engaging students and seeking out their concerns, acting as ‘middle-voice.’ The WF is someone with whom my students felt comfortable revealing their thoughts and questions about academic writing.”

“My WF and I developed a team-teaching approach. He sat in the front of the room when I was teaching and I asked him to chime in with his thoughts, and sometimes we switched roles and I added my comments when he taught mini-lessons. The students seemed to benefit from hearing two points of view, and my WF lent credibility to my lessons by reinforcing them and sharing his experiences as an undergraduate writer.”

# Overview of the Fellows Program

## Philosophy

The Writing Fellows Program is designed to link writing support to classes that require substantial amounts of writing. It particularly targets classes in which students are likely to be encountering new audiences, purposes, genres, and expectations for writing. The program is based on the beliefs that by viewing writing as a process, and by learning how to respond to formative feedback from sources in addition to instructors, writers at any level can improve their writing processes and products.

Though not instructors in the course, Fellows with a strong understanding of the writing process and how to constructively critique student writing are able to help students better understand writing assignments, brainstorm ideas, and revise drafts to help students successfully present their thoughts and ideas. In doing so, writing fellows ultimately work to make students stronger, more confident writers.

The Writing Fellows Program is not meant just to benefit student writers or faculty in the ways that having a teaching assistant would do. Rather, the program is meant to benefit the Writing Fellow, as well, as it is an opportunity for the Fellow to learn about teaching writing by collaborating with a faculty mentor. Writing Fellows should be considered novices, not experts, at supporting students' writing. Therefore, careful guidance from the faculty member is essential to the Writing Fellow's successful development.

## Who can be a writing fellow?

Undergraduate writing fellows are either former students of the instructor that the instructor has selected or they are tutors from the current Writing Center undergraduate tutoring staff. Fellows are paid an hourly wage for their work, including time in class, time spent preparing material for class, meetings with their instructor, and time spent supporting students out of class.

## Assigning fellows to classes

The Writing Center Director will accept applications for writing fellows every semester and will then match these requests to fellows' anticipated availability. Since we don't have enough fellows to staff every faculty member's request, our first priority is placing the fellows into courses that satisfy the second writing requirement and courses that include significant writing assignments and have a high DFW rate. Fellows will not be placed with a professor of their current semester classes because the student/professor relationship should remain separate from the specialized fellowship experience.

## What do writing fellows do?

Writing fellows work with the course instructor and the students in the course to enhance the writing instruction and support that goes in during the semester. Fellows will:

- meet with students individually or in small groups to help them during their revision processes, providing support for developing aspects like organization, clarity, argument, analysis/synthesis and style;
- attend an agreed number of class sessions, so they will know what students are learning day-to-day;

- support class discussion and help facilitate small group work.

If appropriate to the course, the faculty member and fellow can agree for the fellow also to:

- help prepare students for and help facilitate in-class or out of class peer response;
- collaborate with the professor to develop and co-facilitate an in-class lesson or out-of-class workshop for the class on a particular writing-related topic;
- provide the instructor (when asked to) with feedback on writing assignment design;
- collaborate with the faculty member on an assessment project or a pedagogy-related research project;
- add content or otherwise participate on Canvas;
- help the professor with some of the logistics of teaching, like taking attendance during online class meetings, facilitating break out groups, collecting questions from students via chat, and facilitating or monitoring discussion forum activity.

### **What things may writing fellows NOT do?**

Although writing fellows may offer a good deal of support, they are NOT graduate teaching assistants. Because of this, fellows are not here to:

- grade papers;
- make sure students understand course content (except as appropriate when supporting students' writing);
- create writing assignments or quizzes;
- serve as substitute teachers.

Writing fellows are also not there to “fix” or edit students’ papers. Their goal is to help students learn writing strategies and skills. Learning about writing is a complicated process that requires trial and error—you are likely to see development in your students’ writing, but not perfection.

### **Suggestions for how fellows can help during class**

The most frequent question both fellow and faculty seem to have about the fellows program is this: what can fellows be doing during class, so that they’re effectively helping? Here are some suggestions:

#### During whole class discussion-based learning, fellows can:

- Help the professor develop prompts or questions before the class meeting;
- “Take the minutes” during full class discussion, to post on Canvas;
- at the end of class (or the beginning of the next class), summarize (or lead students in summary of) the class discussion;
- raise further questions for students to think about on their own after class discussion (or help students develop their own questions to work with on their own or to bring to the professor);

- model strong discussion behavior, like acknowledging others' contributions, clearly and briefly contributing an idea, referring to a reading or lecture, raising questions, etc.

During small group discussion or writing-based learning, fellows can:

- Check in with groups to make sure they're off to a good start on their task;
- Troubleshoot if concerns or questions arise during the course of small group work;
- Support individual students or groups who seem to be struggling more than others;
- Model good collaborative behavior by sticking to the task, soliciting equal input from all group members and keeping things organized;
- Help small groups summarize their discussion to share with the rest of the class;
- Provide corrective feedback or refocus the efforts of groups that seem to need some guidance;
- Facilitate peer response by planning peer response procedures with the professor, then checking in with groups to model peer response, keep them on target, and so on;
- Collect questions from groups to share with the instructor.

During lecture-based learning, fellows can:

- model strong learning habits by taking notes and asking questions;
- during the last few minutes of class or the beginning of the next class, help students summarize what they learned, brainstorm questions, or consider how the material connects with other things they're learning;
- keep an eye on how the class seems to be responding to the material, then offer some feedback to the professor—when did students appear most engaged, when did the fellow notice off-task behavior, when did students appear confused, etc;
- summarize his or her own take-aways from the lesson and share that with the professor, to help the professor plan future classes;
- at the beginning of class, ask the students to write down and share their current thinking on the topic of the lecture, then follow up in small groups after the lecture, or at the beginning of the next class;

- assist students whose learning needs make absorbing lecture material difficult by taking notes, sharing notes, pointing to relevant material in the textbook during the lecture, meeting after class to discuss the students' understanding;
- track topics, ideas, etc. in the lecture that they know particular students are writing about (or have expressed interest in)—follow up individually with those students.

Out of class, fellows can:

- Meet individually with students at any stage of their writing process;
- Meet with students to discuss your written feedback and help them plan revisions based on it;
- Prepare (and deliver in class) mini-lessons about specific writing topics;
- Provide support materials on Canvas, or lead Canvas discussions;
- Meet with small groups who are co-authoring papers or working on group projects to facilitate their efforts;
- Provide workshops on special topics for small groups of students;
- Lead out-of-class peer response.

### **How may the program affect your course?**

This program is designed to assist you in teaching writing in your course. It is not designed to change the focus of the course. It should not affect your course goals, but it may affect some course logistics, especially if you want to require students to meet their fellow before submitting drafts to you. Keep in mind that having a writing fellow does require a time commitment from you, as you are asked to communicate regularly with your fellow and support your fellow's learning about teaching writing.

### **Communication among fellow – faculty member—students**

The role of the fellow is to provide assistance to student writers in a collaborative manner. Through conversation, the fellow will help writers to get started or to revise and edit their assignments. Although this sounds simple enough, in reality the role of a writing fellow can be confusing for everyone, including the students. Fellows should consider what is appropriate and professional before they discuss any aspect of student interactions with anyone but the Writing Center Director.

Individual Support Verification--When students meet with the fellow for a one-on-one conference, the fellow can report back to the instructor by keeping a log of meetings in a Google sheet, or by sending an email to the faculty member summarizing what writing topics were addressed in the meeting.

Informal discussions--When discussing specific students with the professor, fellows should be particularly thoughtful about their comments. ("Low-stakes" conversations between writers and fellows is one of the most useful characteristics of the peer tutoring model, and if students are worried that details of their conversations with a fellow will be reported back to the faculty member, they may not feel comfortable asking the fellow questions or testing out new ideas.) When appropriate, fellows can assure their students that discussions during the tutoring sessions will remain confidential other than what is written on the memo that they filled out together.

Professionalism--It is equally important that the faculty member feels confident the fellow is supporting their teaching strategies in a professional manner at all times. If a student asks the fellow a question and the fellow is unsure of the answer, the fellow will refer the student back to the faculty member for clarification. While it is excellent for a writing fellow to express empathy when students are struggling with writing or course content, it is important for the fellow to remember that they are part of the teaching team, so personal criticism of the instructor is inappropriate. It is important for the instructor to treat the writing fellow as a colleague, too, making sure not to diminish or undermine their efforts to support students or expect the fellow to complete tasks they haven't discussed in advance.

Talk to the Writing Center Director--The Writing Center Director is a great resource for the fellows and faculty for any question, no matter how small. If the fellow is concerned about a student for *any* reason at all, he should immediately talk to the WC Director. If the concerns are about a student's safety, the fellow is *obligated* to tell a professional immediately.

### **How do faculty benefit from having a Writing Fellow?**

Faculty definitely benefit from having writing fellows involved in their courses. First and foremost, you (and your students) get extensive support for writing. Students will have extra guidance as they work through a careful revision of their writing.

Having a fellow in your classroom also means that during small group discussions during class, peer response sessions, or in-class group or individual writing time, both you and your fellow can be interacting with students, so they get more feedback on what they are doing/saying/writing.

Writing fellows model responsible, engaged student behaviors, which may raise the level of your students' engagement in formal and informal writing and class participation.

Integrating a writing fellow into your course allows faculty the chance to really examine and clarify course goals and expectations for writing in the course. Discussing your students' writing with your Writing Fellow may help you learn new strategies for assigning, supporting and responding to student writing.

Fellows' engagement in composition and writing center-related research, including presenting at regional and national conferences, offers faculty the opportunity to collaborate on the research.

## **How the Program Works**

### **What are faculty responsibilities to writing fellows?**

- Meeting with your fellow before, or at the very beginning of, the semester to discuss the fellow's role in your class;
- Preparing your fellow to respond to your students' drafts by sharing your expectations for your students' writing;
- Meeting or communicating regularly (1-2 times a week is typical) with your fellow to discuss your students' writing and how the course is going;
- Meeting and/or communicating with the Writing Center Director as agreed or requested, in order to enhance fellows' experiences with the program;
- Staying consistent and considerate in allowing ample time for your fellow to meet with your students out of class;
- Responsibly collaborating with the fellow on developing and facilitating lessons or workshops on writing topics;
- Remembering that your fellow is also a student, so sometimes he or she will have less time available, due to his or her own coursework;
- Offering evaluative feedback on the program when requested, so we can continue to improve it.

### **What are fellows' responsibilities to faculty?**

- Actively working with the faculty member to schedule times to communicate about the course;
- Modeling responsible, engaged student behavior when interacting with students in the course (including arriving early, greeting other students, paying attention, taking notes, and, when invited by the faculty member, asking questions or making comments);
- Respecting and supporting the faculty member's authority and teaching approach by not criticizing assignments, class policies or evaluation practices when talking with students;
- Honoring scheduled appointments with students from the course;
- Communicating with the faculty member in advance if he or she is going to miss class, student meeting, or other activity, as would be expected at any job when the employee is going to be absent from an assigned shift.
- Making reasonable accommodations to meet with students.

### **Meeting with your fellows**

In order to make this program work smoothly and effectively, it is important that you meet with your Fellows a number of times throughout the semester.

#### **Meet with your fellows the first week of classes (or earlier if possible).**

At this meeting, you and your fellow(s) will plan activities for your course.

**Faculty should come to the meeting prepared to:**



- Provide the Writing Fellow with desk copies of the books for the class for him or her to borrow (or make arrangements for the Writing Fellow to get those);
- Share the goals and writing assignments for the class with your fellows;
- Review the syllabus to offer a sense of how the semester will go;
- Discuss which activities, in addition to responding to student drafts, you would like your fellows to do;
- Share draft due dates with your fellows, so they can anticipate when students will seek their support;
- Describe what you value most in student writing and say a little about the stylistic preferences for the kind of writing students will do in the class;
- Tell your fellow about anything you noticed previous students in the course especially needed support with.

**Fellows should come to this meeting prepared to:**

- Introduce yourself and briefly explain your tutoring experience and interests;
- Discuss the goals for the course and establish a combined vision for your role during the semester;
- Discuss thoughts about the writing process and your involvement with the students;
- Go over the syllabus and plan tentative times to collaborate on specific workshops or lessons;
- Ask the professor to introduce you to the class and mention your role in the syllabus;
- Ask about the use of Canvas, Zoom and other online learning platforms in the course.

**Meetings during the semester:**

- Communicate weekly, even if it is briefly or via email, to discuss any changes or developments in the course and to make adjustments to the Fellow's activities as needed.
- If collaborating on lessons or workshops, plan at least one time before the lesson to plan the lesson, and a time to reflect upon the lesson together afterward.
- Meet or check-in after you've responded to or graded papers. This will allow you to point out what was helpful and any other areas you would like fellows to concentrate on in the next round.

**Scheduling out of class student consultations with fellows**

A key contribution fellows make to students' learning is to meet individually with each student outside of class at multiple points during the student's writing process. Fellows can help students develop ideas, conduct research, hone an argument, organize an essay and work on sentence and language level revisions.

It has been the experience of folks involved in this writing fellows program and the experience of professionals in the field of peer learning that students will not necessarily "just naturally" believe that they want or need to meet often with the writing fellow. To encourage the habit of seeking near-peer response, it is a good idea to:

- Discuss the purpose of the writing fellow and what he or she offers the students multiple times;
- Make at least the first meetings with your fellow mandatory;

- Devise some kind of accountability to you for students and make that clear to students. This might mean including meetings with the fellow in how you evaluate participation or a particular writing assignment, making clear that fellows are reporting to you when they've met with students, or asking students to write reflectively about their writing process—including what they've discussed with their writing fellow.

Fellows typically have set hours every week when they're available to meet with students. During times when a due date is coming up, fellows can also agree to meet your students at other times (within reason), so it is appropriate for your students to know how to contact your fellow to arrange that. Keep in mind that fellows can only work a maximum of 10 hours per week for the writing center, including participating in meetings with you and Writing Center staff development activities. With this in mind, it is a good idea to prompt students to begin visiting your fellow early in their writing process (to avoid everyone trying to schedule in a 24 hour period before the draft is due), and to suggest that a half-hour appointment rather than a full hour may be sufficient most of the time.

### **Other fellowing activities**

Co-constructed in-class Lessons--One of the benefits of a fellowship, especially for future teachers, is the opportunity to practice developing and facilitating a lesson about a writing topic. Co-teaching a class will also help the fellow to build credibility with the students and help the fellow seem more approachable. If co-teaching is of interest to the fellow, the professor and fellow will work together to select the learning objectives and develop appropriate learning activities to meet those objectives. However, fellows are not faculty, therefore designing and facilitating lessons on writing topics should be a collaborative enterprise in which the professor guides the fellow's learning about teaching writing. After the lesson is facilitated, the faculty member and fellow will meet to reflect on it. What seemed to work about the lesson? What did not go as expected? What did the faculty member and fellow learn about teaching writing, or about the students based on this experience?

Supplemental Workshops--Fellows may offer students one out-of-class supplemental workshop on a specific topic relevant to the current assignment if they want to and if the faculty member believes it will be helpful. The workshop must be supplementary and optional—in other words, students cannot be required to attend, and the workshop cannot be a substitute for material students need to learn during regular class time. Fellows should realize that it is unlikely they will attract a large group of students, but a workshop is successful if even one student shows up and learns something new. Since workshops are by definition hands-on for the students, the topics should be directly related to the stage of the writing process the students are currently implementing for their assignment (e.g. brainstorming for a topic, researching, organizing, revising, editing, or citing sources) as well as include time for writing and peer review. Like lessons co-constructed for the class, supplemental workshops should be developed collaboratively between the faculty member and writing fellow. After the workshop, the fellow should engage in reflection similar to the post-lesson reflection described in the section above and share their reflection with the faculty member.

Writing Center staff meetings and professional development— the writing center staff meets roughly every 3 weeks. Writing fellows are asked to participate in these meetings if they are not in class at that time.

## Writing Fellow Plan

Writing Fellow:

Faculty Member:

Please check the boxes that best describe the writing fellow's activities and provide additional information where requested.

### 1. In-class activities:

Class meeting days, time, location:

The Writing Fellow will:

Attend every class

Attend class once a week (please specify which day):

Attend a select number of class (please list the dates here):

Approximate # of hours across the semester the fellow will spend in class:

During their time in class, the Writing Fellow will:

Before class, help the professor develop discussion prompts

Take notes that will be made available to students

Participate in full class discussion

Help facilitate small group discussion

Help facilitate students' peer response

Collect students' questions to share with the professor

Other (please describe):

## **2. Out of class activities:**

The writing fellow will keep regular hours every week to meet with students. Those hours will be:

The writing fellow will keep regular hours during only certain weeks of the semester. Those weeks and hours will be:

The Writing Fellow will not keep regular hours but will be available for \_\_\_\_\_ flexible hours during peak writing weeks. Those weeks are:

How will the writing fellow schedule appointments with students in the course?

\_\_\_ via a Doodle poll or gmail appointments

\_\_\_ By using a Google form or doc

\_\_\_ Via email with students

\_\_\_ some other way:

### **Special Activities:**

The writing fellow and faculty member will co-teach a lesson about writing on \_\_\_\_\_ (date). Topic of the lesson:

The writing fellow will prepare and facilitate a supplemental (out of class) workshop, discussion, or peer response session on \_\_\_\_\_ (date). Topic:

The writing fellow will post material to Canvas or respond to message boards/questions about writing. Please describe Canvas activity and estimate total number of hours the writing fellow will devote to this:

Anticipated total number of out of class hours the Writing Fellow will work with students: