

HANDBOOK FOR FACULTY MENTORS TO WRITING FELLOWS

The Writing Fellows Program is supported by the Office of the Provost with oversight provided by the Undergraduate Apprenticeship Program and the University Writing Center's Peer Tutoring in the Disciplines initiative.



**University Writing Center
and
Writing Across the Curriculum

George Mason University**

The purpose of this handbook is to articulate the philosophy and goals behind George Mason University's Writing Fellows Program and help answer some of the questions you may have as participating faculty. In this handbook, you will find specific guidelines and suggestions that will assist you in effectively integrating writing fellows into your course.*

If you have any further questions, please contact Dr. Terry Myers Zawacki, director of Writing Across the Curriculum and the University Writing Center, at 703-993-1187 or through [email](#).

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* For providing models for our handbook, we thank Writing Fellows Programs at the following universities: the University of Wisconsin/Madison, Brigham Young University, and Boise State University.

Introduction: Mission, Goals, and Program Overview

Writing fellows play an integral role in advancing and reinforcing the goals of Writing Across the Curriculum. Teachers, students in the course, and the writing fellows all benefit from the opportunity to have focused discussions about writing processes and practices. Having a Writing fellow allows faculty to emphasize the importance of good writing and provide support for students to become better writers, including the opportunity to revise with feedback, without a significant investment of faculty time. Faculty gain from talking over assignments and evaluation criteria with the writing fellow, who can offer advice from a student's perspective. By engaging in these processes, the fellow also gains valuable insights about teaching, writers, and his/her own writing.

Writing Fellows programs operate within a variety of administrative arrangements. While they are often housed in writing centers or within Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programs, they are generally funded as discrete entities with their own administrative structure and/or budgets to pay fellows and staff support. Mason writing fellows work within the administrative structures of both the University Writing Center and the Undergraduate Student Apprenticeship Program.

Writing fellows are paid a stipend to spend ten hours a week working with you, reading student drafts, developing workshops, and conferencing with students. The fellow will sit in on all or most class meetings, particularly those devoted to discussions of writing assignments, but he or she is not expected to be an expert in the subject matter or course material apart from the writing itself.

To be assigned a writing fellow, faculty should first contact Terry Zawacki to let her know of their interest and to talk about the course in which the fellow would work; generally upper-division writing-intensive courses are given preference. Next faculty and the fellow who has been selected fill out the paperwork required by the [Undergraduate Student Apprenticeship Program](#). Faculty mentors are expected to act as mentors for the writing fellows who are placed with them and to follow the program guidelines described in this handbook. Fellows are expected to do the same.

The first so-named Writing Fellows program was instituted at [Brown University](#). The idea caught on, and the creator of the Brown program went on to provide consultation and training to others who wanted to start at their institutions. While it is hard to determine the exact number of Writing Fellows programs nationally, the [University of Richmond \(VA\)](#), [Brigham Young University](#), [Western Washington University](#), the [University of Wisconsin](#), and [LaSalle University](#) are among the most prominent. The Writing Fellows program was established at George Mason University in 2003. For more information on various Writing Fellows Programs, visit [Fellows page](#) on the WAC Clearinghouse website.

Who Are the Mason Writing Fellows?

Writing Fellows are typically undergraduate students who have taken [CHSS 390: Peer Tutoring in Writing in the Disciplines](#), a one-credit experiential course. Once they have completed at least a semester of tutoring at the Writing Center, peer tutors may apply for a Writing Fellow position to work with student writers in a specific course under the guidance of a faculty mentor. Fellows come from a wide variety of disciplines and are selected based on their performance as writers and their ability to help others improve their writing.

Prior to becoming a Writing Fellow, a student will have successfully completed [CHSS 390: Peer Tutoring](#). In this course, peer tutors are trained how to:

- ◆ Talk about assignments with students
- ◆ Negotiate a session based on what a student wants and what a student needs
- ◆ Avoid falling into the trap of making value judgments of teachers and grades
- ◆ Teach grammar
- ◆ Work with ESL writers
- ◆ Identify and analyze errors
- ◆ Understand and implement the theory and practice of teaching writing
- ◆ Address global issues such as thesis organization
- ◆ Address the mechanics of writing

What Do Writing Fellows Do for You and Your Students?

Depending upon the course and the teacher's goals, Writing fellows assist in any or all of the following activities: give you feedback on whether your writing assignments and evaluation criteria will be clear to students, lead workshops on writing issues, meet with students on drafts, make written comments on drafts, and tutor students individually on their writing. Writing fellows do not give grades on papers or take the place of the teacher in responding to writing; rather they supplement the writing instruction and sometimes help to clarify for students the teacher's goals and expectations.

Writing Fellows are not teachers or graders. They are talented students and writers who are committed to helping you help your students become better writers. They are also apprentices, looking to you, as their mentor, for guidance and support.

Fellows are expected to do all or most of the following:

- ◆ Meet a minimum of three times with their faculty sponsor (outlined in following section)
- ◆ Attend all class sessions to make themselves known to the students as a resource (specifically those relating directly to the assigned paper)
- ◆ Provide input on the syllabus and assignments for the course

- ◆ Collect, make written comments and redistribute a first draft to all students
- ◆ Provide individual tutoring on an as needed/as assigned basis for students
- ◆ Distribute and collect end-of-the course surveys from students and faculty sponsor
- ◆ Complete a Fellows Program evaluation
- ◆ Create a poster presentation describing what has been learned through the experience
- ◆ Prepare and conduct in-class workshops on specific topics relating to writing, if desired by faculty

How Should I Introduce the Fellow to My Students?

Your writing fellow be introduced to students in the first class. After the first introduction, you may find that you should re-introduce the fellow during subsequent class meetings to remind your students of the fellow's role and the kinds of assistance they will be giving to student writers. Sometimes, a few words about the importance of revision in your own work helps reassure students and illustrate the point that every writer needs to revise.

In your introduction, describe the role the writing fellow will play in the class as a specialized, course-specific writing assistant. Also and very importantly, be sure to tell the students about **the credentials** the fellow has for doing this work. For undergraduates to be accepted into the peer tutoring course, a prerequisite for becoming a writing fellow, they must have received A's in upper-division writing courses and have a high GPA. They must also bring recommendations from teachers on their writing and critical thinking abilities. While the fellow may not be an expert in the disciplinary content of the course, as a peer tutor, he/she has had extensive training in how to tutor writing and has also spent a semester or more tutoring writers from first year to graduate courses across the university. As part of his/her writing center experience, your fellow may also have worked with graduate student to create writing center workshops and other specialized writing materials.

When Should I Meet With My Writing Fellow?

A minimum of three meetings is required between you and your fellow, but you are strongly encouraged to keep in constant contact and provide feedback to one another as the semester progresses.

The first meeting between you and your fellow should take place just prior to or during the first week of class. At this meeting you will want to discuss the syllabus, the assignments, and your criteria for evaluating papers. Make sure that you put your fellow's name on the syllabus with his or her e-mail address for easy communication. It is also a good idea to include two or three lines explaining to your students what a Fellow does. You will want to provide the fellow with a desk copy of the texts you will be using in the course. On your syllabus, establish due dates for drafting procedures. Make sure

that you allow two to three weeks between the rough draft and the final paper so that fellows have enough time to read, comment and distribute the drafts, and students have enough time to revise them before the final due date.

In another meeting, discuss your assignment with the fellow and be open to his/her feedback. A fellow can locate points where the assignment is unclear or vague and provide you a window into your students' thinking. Also, discuss together your **criteria** for evaluation of papers and allow input from your fellow. We strongly suggest that you develop an evaluation/response criteria sheet for each assignment if you don't already have such a rubric. This will help the fellow know what to focus on in his/her comments.

Meet again after your students' first drafts have been collected but before your fellow writes comments on them. During this meeting, you should conduct a "normed" reading. In a "normed" reading session, you read two or more drafts aloud, pausing periodically to allow the fellow to listen to you as you evaluate the paper and explain your thoughts according to your criteria for evaluation. These "normed" sessions allow your fellow to become acquainted with your expectations and standards and also offer a window into how you think about student writing when your expectations have or have not been met. The more insight the fellow has into how you evaluate your students' papers, the better prepared they will be to write comments that match your expectations.

Schedule another meeting after students have turned in their final versions of the paper. This meeting gives you and your fellow the opportunity to discuss concerns in students' papers and to determine whether students revised according to the fellow's advice as well as whether the fellow's advice was in tune with your expectations. It is important to let your fellow know if you disagree with his/her written comments, and it is equally important for your fellow to see how his/her comments are being received both by you and your students. The more communication there is between you and your fellow, the more successful the fellow will be in helping the student writers in your course.

How Will My Fellow Pick Up and Return Drafts?

Your fellow can collect drafts from the students or pick them up directly from you. The advantage of collecting papers directly from the students is that it allows you to note who has turned in drafts; in addition, you can quickly check the papers over to make sure that the drafts are truly drafts and not incomplete or rough outlines. You may even want to skim through the first two pages of each draft to identify students who may need extra help. This might be the time to suggest or require that a student make a conference with the fellow to discuss revisions.

Fellows can return drafts with their written comments to students in class. This is best done during the last ten minutes of class as it allows fellows to talk with students and arrange conferences, if necessary or desired. You may choose to give the drafts back to the students yourself, thus reinforcing the trust you have in the fellow's comments. Ideally, you will have met with the fellow, looked over at least some of his/her comments

on the drafts so that you can spend time in class addressing the most common strengths and difficulties that the Fellow noted.

You might want to require your students to include their drafts with the submission of their final papers. This requirement emphasizes the importance you place on revision and it allows you to see how your fellow's comments have affected your students' revisions.

What Kinds of Comments Will Writing Fellows Make?

Writing fellows are not editors or teachers. They do not proofread or grade. Instead, they ask questions, note areas that lack sufficient development or seem unclear, and point out errors that may appear in patterns throughout the draft. While the fellows will examine a paper's organization, style, coherence, and clarity, they are not equipped to comment on the accuracy of a paper's content. They will record their confusion, dissatisfaction, and enjoyment of the paper as they read it through to the end. Fellows' comments are written with the intention of improving the students' writing, which may or may not result in improving students' grades.

How is the Program Evaluated?

At the end of the program, your fellow will ask you to reserve ten minutes of class time to allow your students to complete a one page student survey of the program. The fellow will provide you with an evaluation form specific to the program. These evaluations are very important as they help the fellow assess their strategies and determine goals for future classes. Please ask students to fill out these surveys in class. Students who take them home do not usually complete them.

You will also fill out an evaluation of the fellow's work and your perception of the effect he/she may have had on the student writers/writing. Your input is critical to the success of the Writing Fellows program. We welcome your suggestions for improvement.

Along with student and faculty evaluations, fellows will fill out their own fellow survey. They, too, will evaluate their role and suggest ways to make the program stronger. Fellows are also expected to prepare a poster presentation of their semester experience for the annual Innovations celebration of scholarship and teaching.

The evaluation forms can be found [here](#).

Do I personally evaluate the Fellow?

Writing Fellows may choose to take **CHSS 490: Writing Fellowship** during their apprenticeship though they are not required to do so. This course is a three-credit

independent study and is offered to all students taking part in the Undergraduate Apprenticeship Program. If your fellow is enrolled in CHSS 490, you will need to evaluate his/her performance and suggest a grade to the teacher of record for that course or to Terry Zawacki, (tzawacki@gmu.edu or 703-993-1187). The Director of the Student Undergraduate Apprenticeship Program makes the final assessment of student participants' work and administers the Fellow's grade for CHSS 490. Should you have any questions about this process, do not hesitate to contact Terry.

Finally, we hope that you will consider taking your fellow out to lunch or coffee, or maybe just invite them to your office so that you can formally thank them. Since fellows are students too, they work hard to complete their class obligations at the same time that they are fulfilling their writing fellow commitments. A few words of praise or a nice note can go a long way.