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Executive Summary

The Writing Fellows Program at Boston College began in 2004 as an initiative to enhance the
effectiveness of writing and writing instruction in undergraduate courses across the curriculum.
The Writing Fellows Program pairs trained graduate-student writing fellows with faculty
members who want to focus more attention on student writing in a course. Writing fellows meet
individually with students and assist them with three to four papers during the semester, offering
feedback on paper drafts. Fellows receive training in responding to student writing and in the
rhetorical expectations of the specific discipline and writing assignments. The faculty members
also engage in an ongoing dialogue with the writing fellows to clarify what constitutes effective
writing in each specific disciplinary and rhetorical situation.

Working with the fellows becomes an integral part of a course, ensuring that students are getting
quality feedback on their writing, especially in larger courses that make such concentrated
individual attention difficult for faculty to provide. The benefits of this program are three-tiered:
first, students benefit from conferencing, mentorship, and direct writing instruction with their
writing fellow. Second, faculty benefit from direct interaction with the fellows and learn what
types of writing instruction are most effective for achieving their learning goals. Third, the writing
fellows benefit, honing their teaching and conferencing skills as they prepare to teach in the FWS
program. Since 2004, over 3000 students have been a part of a writing-fellowed course.

Partners: The program is interdisciplinary in nature. While the majority of the graduate fellows
are MA students from the BC English department, in recent years we have employed MA students
from Philosophy, Teacher Education, and Romance Languages. We have partnered with faculty in
all four of the undergraduate schools (A&S, LSOE, CSON, CSOM) in a range of disciplines. The
response has been overwhelmingly positive; on average 88% of students agree or strongly agree
that conferring with writing fellows has improved their writing. Faculty have noted that student
writing has been better organized and that their own ability to write effective assignments
improved as a direct result of the program. Since the summer of 2008, the program has also
partnered with the BAIC's OTE program and supported the freshman who attend the program.

Technology: Beginning in 2009, with an ATIG grant, the program integrated a series of new
technologies to enhance the interactions between fellows, students and faculty. These
technologies include a MacBook for each fellow, audio recording software for student meetings, a
Blackboard (now Canvas) component to enable collaboration between faculty, student, and
writing fellows; and finally a Microsoft Word electronic paper-free comment system allowing for
clear and direct writing feedback.

2014-2015: In its 11th year the Writing Fellows program partnered with faculty and students in
Economics, Sociology, Theology, Nursing, Accounting, and the OTE program. During the fall, spring
and summer semesters the program served 600 students. The program employed its most diverse
cohort to date with fellows from English, Teacher Education and Philosophy. Over 88% of
students in the fall and 90% of students in the spring believed the program improved their
writing. 90% of students surveyed said they would take another writing-fellowed class and
recommend their roommate or friend to do the same. All of the faculty members who worked with
the program found the Writing Fellows program to be a helpful resource for their course, and one
that they hope to utilize in future classes. The program has also influenced how the faculty
members approach writing their assignments and communicating their expectations to students.
They realized the need to be more explicit in articulating the writing expectations and conventions
in their disciplines.
2014-2015 Report on the Writing Fellows Program

Fellows and Faculty Partners in 2014-2015
In 2014-2015 the Writing Fellows Program employed seventeen fellows and included fellows from English, Teacher Education, and Philosophy as well as five returning fellows. The increasing interdisciplinary constitution of the program is a sign of its strength, the value of its training program, and an element we hope to develop in the future.

Additionally, fellows, faculty and students used the various technological components with greater facility. The percentages of students using the audio recordings and electronic comments were up significantly from the previous year. Over 92% of student found the electronic comments on their writing useful.

In fall 2014 the Writing Fellows Program renewed partnerships with Professor Matthew Rutledge (Public Policy in an Aging Society), Professor Joe Quinn (Micro Public Policy Issues), Professor Rita Owens (Business Writing and Communication), and with Professor Gustavo Morello, partnering with his two Sociology courses (Introduction to Latin American Societies and Religion and Social Change in Latin American Societies). Over 88% of students surveyed in the fall reported that the purpose of the program was clear, that the feedback was helpful, and that it improved their written work.

In spring 2015 we continued working with Professor Gustavo Morello, Professor Matthew Rutledge, and Rita Owens. We renewed our partnership with Dean Sean Clarke and Professor Stacey Barone (Introduction to Professional Nursing) and added a partnership with Professor Yonder Gillihan (Biblical Heritage II). Over 90% of the students surveyed reported that the purpose of the program was clear and that fellows’ comments were helpful to their writing.

In the summer of 2015, the Writing Fellows Program partnered for the eighth consecutive year with BC’s Options Through Education (OTE) Summer Transitional Program for incoming students. Fellows worked with the four sections of English offered through the OTE summer program.

Since 2004, over 3000 students have been part of a writing-fellowed course. We currently reach about 5-6% of the student body each year, but hope to increase this percentage as our program continues to grow and become a permanent fixture on the Boston College campus.

Accomplishments in 2014-2015
Since its inception in 2004 the Writing Fellows Program at Boston College has sought to achieve three goals:

(1) To help students develop their writing ability over their undergraduate years and to write confidently across the curriculum.
(2) To provide faculty with a helpful teaching aid and pedagogical reinforcement tools.
(3) To provide the writing fellows, by frequent interaction with faculty and students, with valuable experience in teaching, tutoring, and mentoring thereby making them better Teaching Fellows in the FWS and other programs.

Over the past eleven years the program has consistently met—and exceeded—these objectives:
1. **Students have become more adept and confident writers**, encountering greater continuity between their First-Year Writing Seminar and discipline-specific core courses.

- 90% of students surveyed felt the program as a whole was a helpful resource.
- 88% of students surveyed found their writing fellow a helpful resource for their writing.
- 91% found their Fellow’s feedback clear.
- 88% of students reported that the program improved the quality of their finished work.
- 90% of students reported that they would take another course with a fellow or recommend that a friend do so.

Many students added additional comments, which clustered around four main themes:

- **Students were very satisfied with their particular writing fellow:**
  - “My writing fellow was a huge help during our meetings and she provided very useful feedback.”
  - “My writing fellow was very helpful in guiding me as I further developed my paper, and provided a lot of key insight.”
  - “Five stars for [my writing fellow]- friendly, punctual, and helpful.”
  - “My writing fellow clearly spent a lot of time reviewing my paper and made great suggestions that helped make my paper concise and focused.”

- **Students came away with a sense of pride and accomplishment in their writing:**
  - “The Writing Fellows program was a very helpful program and successfully helped me achieve a great final draft.”
  - “My writing fellow made a clear effort to try to get to know me as a student and the type of writing style I had. He did not try to change how I wrote but helped me to improve on the assets I already had.”
  - “All of our meetings were productive and I always came out of those meetings ready to further my writing.”
  - “I really enjoyed having this resource, especially because it made me feel more confident in my writing.”

- **When asked if they would take another writing-fellowed course the students responded:**
  - “Certainly. Any undergraduate writer can benefit from having their work looked at by graduate students and applying their critiques to their own writing.”
  - “Yes, I think it is a very valuable resource and very helpful.”
  - “Yes, the writing fellow definitely helped me improve my papers.”
  - “Yes, I would. I think a Writing Fellow is especially resourceful in writing intensive courses to give students individual attention and feedback.”

- **A number of students expressed a desire to see the program expand:**
  - “I think the Writing Fellows Program is very helpful, but should be used more often in classes—I had never heard of it before this class.”
  - “I would recommend the Writing Fellow program [for] classes such as Literature Core or other larger classes.”
  - “I found the program to be very useful and helpful. Before using the program, I did not know anything about Writing Fellows and because of this, I would not have utilized [them] if it was not required for my paper. Now, however, I am much more likely to make use of it.”
2. Faculty have found the Writing Fellows Program to be a helpful teaching aid and pedagogical reinforcement tool as they teach students what are often tacit assumptions about what constitutes successful writing in their disciplines.

- All the faculty members interviewed found the program to be an extremely helpful resource in both aiding students and in influencing how they communicate their assignments and structure their courses. Below are some excerpts from their end-of-term interviews. Faculty were asked to speak about the program in relation to specific features of their courses:

  - **Student Writing**
    - Professor Joe Quinn explains, “[The program] allows us to not only have more writing assignments, but to have students rewrite, which is just worth its weight in gold. And the second draft is always so much better.”
    - Professor Stacey Barone states, “We need all the help we can get in terms of writing, the work you guys do with them helps us to then bring the papers to a different level, it allows us to focus on content rather than structure, formatting, and grammar.”

  - **Assignment Drafting**
    - Professor Stacey Barone found the program helpful in the way she wrote her assignments. She explains, “Knowing that there would be a third party looking over these assignments made me really consider them and make them as clear as they could be. So that if you were just randomly read them- would you be able to understand them? I changed the wording, the length of the paper, made sure that in the description, I made sure it was clear what was included.”
    - Professor Barone also explained that Dean Sean Clarke of Nursing is set to take over Introduction to Nursing next year, and plans to change the schedule of the assignments in order to allow for more time for the students to meet with the writing fellows.
    - After working with the program last year, Professor Rutledge provided his students with a template that he had discussed with the writing fellows the previous semester. “I learned that I need to give a lot more guidance to the students as to what the final paper should look like. That’s why I have the template on Canvas. It’s for the writing fellows as well as students. Now, they [final papers] look much more like what they’re supposed to look like.”

  - **Concluding Comments**
    - Many faculty expressed gratitude and a desire to both continue with the program and to see the program used more widely:
      - Professor Stacey Barone belongs to the Baccalaureate Planning Committee, a committee that covers all the nursing courses taught at BC. She plans to pitch the Writing Fellows at their next planning meeting, and suggest that other writing intensive nursing courses work with the program.
      - Professor Matthew Rutledge expressed his view that the program should be
more widely utilized in classes with a writing component. He explains that it is important for more professors to know about the program, which cannot happen until the program grows. “My colleagues didn’t know they could have writing fellows. I would say there’s a lack of outreach, but I know that there are limited numbers of writing fellows. Social sciences and even technical sciences could benefit from having writing fellows. From my experience, final versions were more readable.”

- Professor Joe Quinn would also like to see the program grow, “I think there’s a very good argument for expanding the program as long as there are more of you out there who we can hire. Everybody should be helping folks write. There are courses in which it wouldn’t happen without you. In the past the teachers and the students really appreciated it.”

- Overall, faculty members have expressed satisfaction with their experience working with the Writing Fellows program. They appreciate the work the fellows have put into their courses, citing the improvements in student writing as well as the clarifications they have been able to add to their assignments. Each professor expressed a wish to both continue working with the program and to see it expand in their departments.

3. Writing fellows have improved their teaching, tutoring and mentoring skills, which in turn improve the quality of teaching fellows in the FWS Program.

- The 2014-2015 Writing Fellows found the experience to be a valuable tool in preparing them to take on future teaching roles, especially that of a First-Year Writing Seminar instructor.
  - One fellow stated, “Writing Fellows gave me an opportunity to meet with the same students multiples times throughout the semester, which was a new experience for me. I really appreciate having an opportunity to get a sense of how each student approached the assignment, and then to follow up again to see if they were able to build on the first draft. Working with students through more steps in the writing process (than previous tutoring experience) definitely helped prepare me for conferencing with students throughout the drafting process next semester. I gained a better sense of what to focus on when I know something is a first draft and how to prioritize my feedback. Working closely with the same group of students also gave me a better sense of what it is like to communicate with and work with students, especially freshman. I did not foresee some of the more logistical challenges I faced, and sometimes it was difficult not to let those things affect my feedback/interaction with the students.
  - Another fellow noted, “I think having a better understanding of how students approach conferences and drafts will help me be more clear and productive in my own class. Also, talking to the professor’s about their expectations, seeing their assignments, and hearing the students’ interpretations of the assignments really emphasized that clarity and communication between the teacher and students is really important and not always easy.”
• **Pedagogical Skills.** Overwhelmingly, fellows felt that the program provided them with experience that will prepare them to be Teaching Fellows and Teaching Assistants.

  o “[The writing fellow experience] stressed how imperative it is to have an open environment that encourages questions. The experience of being a Writing Fellow has provided me with the opportunity to think ahead to next year when I will be a teaching assistant and how I will lead discussions in class, as well as how I will handle conferences with different kinds of students. I believe that being a Writing Fellow has ultimately prepared me more for this position. Not only has it made me feel more confident in my own abilities to help students with their writing, but it has also aided my communication skills as well. Providing directions, and even offering constructive feedback, are pedagogical skills that are crucial to effective communication between teachers, teaching assistants, and students. In this regard, the Writing Fellows program is successful in the way that it helps both the Fellows and the students they work with sharpen their writing and communication skills—something that is incredibly beneficial for one’s academic career and beyond.

  o “One of the biggest things that I learned as a Writing Fellow was to allow for silence or for the student to tell me what they want to see in their writing or where they need help. At first, I felt as though I had to fill the silence and talk at them for the entire meeting. I eventually realized that if you ask the right questions, the student would talk more and be more likely to come up with solutions themselves. Although it isn’t always easy, I believe that this skill will be very helpful when I am teaching next year. I find that it is sometimes more rewarding to feel as though you have assisted a student in trusting themselves and their own intuition about writing or the argument of their paper, rather than “feeding” the answers.”

  o “I think that, especially in contrast to my experience tutoring, the Writing Fellows program has been an invaluable experience before I teach FWS in the coming academic year. The key components being that I was able to develop a rapport with the students through our ongoing dialogue throughout the semester, and that I was able to see their drafts and know the assignment well before meeting with them. Most specifically, I think this will go a long way to not only preparing me for individual conferences with students, but also to designing assignments that are clearly explained and that I can therefore easily assess.”

• **Technology.** The technology components were likewise well received and employed by the fellows.

  o "As a writing fellow, it was extremely helpful to have technology that aided my work in working with the students. Students have told me that the Microsoft Word margin comments for revisions and the audio recording of the paper meetings are two particular tools that provide a great support system in the revision process, and I also agree that both tools were a great benefit to not only the students but also to myself as a writing fellow who wanted to provide the best possible assistance to the students.”
• **Rewarding Work.** All the Fellows surveyed found the program to be a valuable experience on personal, intellectual and pedagogical levels.
  o “Being a writing fellow is an experience that I will never forget. The work was extremely helpful in preparing for teaching my own class, in more ways than one. Not only did I get the experience of regularly conferencing with students and critiquing their writing, I got to know the students at Boston College. Having an understanding of the student culture and expectations at BC was invaluable when it came to connecting with my own students.”
  o “The aspect of the Writing Fellows program that I found most beneficial for my own teaching was seeing the way students interacted with their professors... overall, as a teacher thinking constantly about ways to improve my own assignments, seeing where the confusion occurred in the prompt and in the professor's writing was constructive for my own future teaching and writing.”
  o “Working with the student’s drafts and then seeing how they incorporated what we talked about into their second draft makes me feel more confident in working with students next year in a revision-focused FWS class. I feel that I have gained experience and confidence in approaching student drafts with suggestions and constructive criticism, as well as in handling more challenging situations, such as students who do not see a need to tailor their work to the assignment. This experience has been instrumental in helping me gain the confidence I will need to be an effective FWS teacher.”

**Goals for the Writing Fellows Program in 2015-2016**

This coming year we will continue to expand the existing program while we seek to better understand the specific writing needs across the university. When asked last year what could be more effective about the Writing Fellows Program at Boston College, Acting Provost Joseph Quinn responded that his “only real concern about the WF program is that not enough professors know about it and that the budget is small.” We are grateful for the additional resources provided by the Provost’s office which allowed us to employ our largest cohort of Writing Fellows since the start of the program.

Our long-term goal is to develop the Writing Fellows Program so that it can work annually with 10-20% of the undergraduate student population, with the hope that all undergraduate students can take at least one writing-fellowed course during their undergraduate career. Organizationally, the Writing Fellows Program has been housed in the English Department and jointly managed between the English Department and the Connors Family Learning Center. As the program grows beyond English and the mission of the Connors Center, we feel that the near future would be the opportune time to consider the creation of a Writing Center, which would house together the writing fellows program, writing tutoring, online writing
tutoring, and various graduate initiatives such as dissertation boot camp. We plan to continue our research into how other university writing fellow programs are organized and administered to make optimal use of an expanded BC program.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, we plan to continue implementing and familiarizing fellows, faculty and students with the technological advances begun in 2009-2010. Another goal will be a more formal analysis of the data and archived documents collected thus far. This research will result in, among other things, an increasingly refined collection of pedagogical techniques for fellows and faculty to use in teaching and tutoring writing across the curriculum. We will use the experiences and data collected to better assess and improve the program. With more than four years of archived documents and recordings the database will be an invaluable training tool for the incoming writing fellows and all those we reach through our conference presentations and future publications. Regarding the latter we hope to begin compiling our data into a publishable format so that our successes may be imitated in other programs.

Acknowledgments

As in any successful educational initiative, collaboration has been essential to the program. We are especially grateful this year to David Quigley, Provost and Dean of Faculties and Patricia DeLeeuw, Vice Provost for Faculties for their support in expanding the program. In this endeavor we also appreciate the support of Suzanne Matson, Chair of the English Department. To this year’s instructors, Joseph Quinn, Rita Owens, Yonder Gillihan, Matthew Rutledge, Gustavo Morello, Sean Clarke, and Stacey Barone, we thank you for sharing your students and classes with us.

Our debt grows annually to the members of Instructional Design and eTeaching Services (IDeS) group who have provided invaluable support for the technology components of the program: Helen Healy, Peter Hess, and Tim Lindgren. Whenever we had a question or needed help with the technology, they provided timely and expert assistance.

Finally, a deep and indispensable thank you to this year’s writing fellows, Jacob Reyna, Lauren Bell, Ranya Al-Mashouk, Thomas Cianciola, Jocelyn Rice, Amy Ribakove, Heejoo Park, Zachary Weinsteiger, Rob Stone, Angelina Rotman, Kathleen Steele, Gretchen Fredericksen, Olivia Cline, Rachael McIntosh, Caroline Sipio, Laura Hayes, Kathleen Van De Wille and Kakas Rish. We appreciate your intellectual capability and commitment, dedication and wonderful work with the students and faculty.

Many other hands and minds helped shepherd the Writing Fellows Program since 2004. This initiative began from a series of conversations between Paula Mathieu, Bryan Marinelli, Paul Gray, and Arts and Sciences Dean Joseph Quinn. The collaboration among Paula Mathieu, Bryan Marinelli, and Staci Shultz was key to getting the pilot off the ground, and the insights and hard work of Staci, Bryan, Sue Barrett and Diane Hotten-Somers have been essential to its continued existence and development. The faculty with whom we have cooperated were generous with their time and adaptable to this new idea as well as supportive throughout. The OTE program directors, Dr. Ines Maturana-Sendoya, Andy Petigny, and Yvonne McBarnett made possible the smooth integration of the writing fellows into the summer program.
beginning in 2008. Our ten years of writing fellows offered their hard work, enthusiasm, and vital feedback, which helped refine this pilot.

This project would not have been possible without the support of two BC Teaching Advising and Mentoring Grants and the Academic Technology Innovation Grant (ATIG) that enabled us to add such an innovative technology component to the program. The Offices of the Academic Vice President and of the Provost and the Arts and Sciences Deans Office have shown unwavering support and continued funding for the program. Mary Crane, Chair of the English Department, at the time the program was started has also been a strong supporter of the pilot initiative, offering advice, and encouragement. Finally, we would like to thank the students who have and will take part in the Writing Fellows Program, and who, we hope, will appreciate and understand writing a bit more because of this project; the students and their writing is what is most important to the Writing Fellows Program.

About the Report’s Authors

Marla De Rosa, Director of the Writing Fellows Program is also an adjunct faculty member in the English Department. In addition to teaching First-Year Writing Seminar and the Literature Core, she has a background in working with bilingual students. She has worked with Paula Mathieu as a mentor for new FWS instructors. In May of 2015, she completed her Ph.D. in the Lynch School of Education’s Curriculum & Instruction Program where she studied the complex factors involved in student reading and writing in science disciplines.

Paula Mathieu, Director of the First-Year Writing Program and the Writing Fellows Program, is an Associate Professor in the English Department. She is a specialist in rhetoric and writing pedagogy, with a doctorate in Language, Literacy and Rhetoric from the University of Illinois at Chicago. In 2005, she published Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition and has co-edited two other books. In addition to writing pedagogy, her scholarship centers on public discourse and homeless writers.

Lauren Bell recently earned her Masters Degree in English from Boston College. She is an adjunct professor at BC and has been a Writing Fellow since 2013.