

Form E-1-A for Boston College Departments/Programs
English Department: First-Year Writing (FWS): Core Writing Program 2023-4

1) Learning Outcomes: The Boston College First-Year Writing Program (FWS) has had formal learning outcomes since 2004. They were most recently reviewed in 2018 and plans are underway for a review and revision starting in 2025.

The FWS outcomes read as follows:

Outcomes for the Boston College First-Year Writing Seminar

By the end of First-Year Writing students should be able to do the following:

Rhetorical Knowledge

- Focus on a purpose in their writing
- Respond to the needs of different audiences
- Respond appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations, including but not limited to academic rhetorical situations
- Write in several genres

Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing

- Use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating
- Understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources
- Integrate their own ideas with those of others

Processes

- Be aware that it usually takes multiple drafts to create and complete a successful text
- Develop flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading
- Understand writing as an open process that permits writers to use later invention and re-thinking to revise their work
- Understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes
- Learn to critique their own and others' works
- Learn to balance listening to and relying on others with responsibilities of doing their part

Knowledge of Conventions

- Learn common formats for different kinds of texts
- Develop knowledge of genre conventions ranging from structure and paragraphing to tone and mechanics
- Practice appropriate means of documenting their work
- Control such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Composing in Electronic Environments

- Use electronic environments for drafting, reviewing, revising, editing, and sharing texts
- Locate, evaluate, organize, and use research material collected from electronic sources, including scholarly library databases; other official databases (e.g., federal government databases); and informal electronic networks and internet sources
- Understand and exploit the differences in the rhetorical strategies and in the affordances available for both print and electronic composing processes and texts

2) These learning outcomes are published in our mentoring guidelines and on our website, listed under resources for faculty: <https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/mcas/departments/english/about/learning-outcomes.html>

3) **Assessment**

This year was a time of transition. Paula Mathieu, who has directed the FWS program for a total of 18 years, and consecutively since 2009, has begun the handoff of directorship of the FWS Program to Dr. Jessica Pauszek, who takes over officially, June 1, 2024. To prepare for this transition, Pauszek taught the graduate pedagogy class twice, so she will have worked with the new TFs starting this fall. Together, we have begun planning to assess and revise FWS outcomes and rethink certain structures in our program. While we had many initiatives this year, three have been most central:

1. Seminar for English Faculty to Learn to Teach FWS

Typically, around 80% of all FWS classes have been taught by either graduate students or adjunct instructors, and in recent years we've had to hire many part-time faculty, as many as **eleven** new part-time instructors in a given year. Thanks to support by the MCAS Dean's Office and the BC Associate Dean for the Core, we held an intensive faculty seminar training for a range of department faculty: two full professors; five associate professors; two assistant professors; and two Professors of the Practice. Over the four sessions that spanned half of the spring semester, faculty learned about the program, interacted with readings, assignments, and syllabi, and drafted their own assignments with a plan to teach FWS within the next year.

This influx of permanent BC faculty into FWS will benefit students, as their instructors will be able to mentor them during and beyond their first year better than temporary faculty. And it will benefit faculty to allow them to teach this seminar-style core class that is central to BC's mission.

The seminar was taught by Paula Mathieu, Jessica Pauszek, and Vincent Portillo. And while we haven't yet solicited anonymous feedback from participants, colleagues have shared that they found the seminar valuable and engaging.

2. Beginning to Build an FWS Pedagogy Archive

Starting with a CDIL program for integrative learning, Paula Mathieu started researching ways to organize an archive of teaching materials and experimented with possible sites for organization. In the past FWS has used Mediakron, Canvas, and Google docs to store and share assignment prompts, student essays, but none has proven easy to search and update. In the spring, Jessica Pauszek and a graduate research assistant continued exemplar syllabi and assignment prompts, and started working with data tagging to help guide and train new teaching fellows and other new FWS faculty. This is a work in progress.

3. Rethinking FWS Mentorship of Teaching Fellows

When Paula Mathieu took on FWS, she was permitted to hire an Associate FWS Director from among our adjunct faculty to help mentor and visit classes of new TFs. We also run a weekly practicum for all new teaching fellows. Since we have had up to more than 20 new instructors in a given year, the FWS Program enlisted long-term FWS instructors who are adjunct faculty to also assist with this mentoring. In 2015, FWS received a TAM Grant to formalize its mentoring training program, which has helped make new Teaching Fellows highly successful in the classroom.

This year, the English Planning Committee raised concerns about allowing adjunct faculty to work in this capacity and discussed possible approaches. No concrete alternatives were identified yet, so the plan is for Jess Pauszek to continue with the same staffing model as she steps into the program and assess, with an eye toward involving doctoral students in the Associate Director role or other alternatives. She met with Dean Kalscheur to discuss possibilities and future plans.

4) **2023-2024 Assessment Processes:**

Since the three FWS Initiatives are related to but are not directly assessment themselves, we did not undertake a formal program assessment this year. Jess Pauszek will take up assessment of FWS next year, guided by her experience and expertise as a scholar and previous writing-program administrator. She has mentioned that she is considering ways to begin a Celebration of Student Writing event that could potentially both assess and showcase student writing.

5) **Results**

—The FWS Faculty Seminar will lessen the critical shortage of FWS instructors, helping ease the program's overwhelming reliance on part-time faculty, at least in the short term. It will remain to be seen if these faculty continue to teach FWS going forward.

—The FWS Archive is just at its most beginning stages (pre-pilot), and will require funding and labor to fulfill its potential to archive exemplar teaching materials and be a searchable resource for FWS instructors, both which would contribute immensely to the success of the program.

—Supporting and staffing the FWS Program is an ongoing conversation that will continue beyond this year.

Past FWS-Related Innovations

1. **2023 Assessment: New Adjunct Instructors and Teaching Fellows Meet All Outcomes:** 2020-2022: In the graduate seminar that all MA and PhD teaching fellows (TFs) take prior to teaching FWS, all TFs draft an assignment sequence and syllabus that meets the above course outcomes. I and the FWS Mentors (Dacia Gentilella, Martha Hincks, Kristin Imre, and Brian Zimmerman) help the TFs revise their course documents to that each assignment has clear writerly goals that can be taught and assessed. We make design of [clear assignment prompts](#) central to teaching FWS. This year, we assessed that all TFs who taught FWS has clear writerly goals outlined in their assignment prompts that collectively met all the FWS outcomes. In 2022, we extended this assessment to our new adjunct faculty who teach FWS. **We found that all outcomes are being met in the syllabi but could be signaled more clearly. It might also point to a need to streamline the course outcomes, which is a plan for 2025 once the new FWS Director is in place.** Our hope is that the FWS Digital Archive can help prepare and onboard new instructors so that students are all given quality instruction in writing.
In 2023-2024, our planned assessment initiative is to begin building a digital archive of exemplar FWS course materials, including assignment prompts, lesson plans, readings, sample student essays. The FWS Program Director (Paula Mathieu) will be working as part of an Integrated Learning Group through the Center for Digital

Innovation in Learning (CDIL) to begin to build this digital archive to help make onboarding of new instructors and communicating course goals and outcomes clearer and more accessible.

2. New Adjunct Instructors Have Mixed Classroom Success:

When hiring so many new staff each year, some instructors adapt to teaching BC teaching of FWS better than others. Through course evaluations and class visits, the FWS Director, with advice from the English department chair, identified instructors needing extra mentoring and support. This included additional classroom visits and feedback meetings, in-person and zoom meetings, and feedback on class materials. The goal is to have high standards for classroom instruction and to offer mentoring to those who teach FWS.

3. Exploring Pilot Opportunities for Graduate Teaching Fellows: Innovation is an important part of keeping the FWS program vital and a rich experience for students. In 2022-2023 we ran a pilot project inviting five TFs to teach two fall sections of FWS instead of one, and one spring section. This gave instructors more teaching experience and more income. Survey results from the graduate participants is pending but seem overwhelmingly positive. For a second year, two TFs with English Language Learning tutoring experience taught one ELL FWS section in the fall and a traditional FWS class in the spring. These pilots give interested TFs more pedagogical experience working with a broader range of BC first-year students.

- **BC Writing Center:** The BC Writing Center, started in 2019, has moved from a pilot to a small permanent program. The program now has support from the Provost's office, an annual budget, and a graduate assistant. Several questions are still pending, including leadership (it is still being run voluntarily by three English faculty for no additional compensation).
- **Enrichment Opportunities.** Each year the Boston Rhetoric and Writing Network (BRAWN) sponsors a Summer Institute, which is a free two-day pedagogy workshop, open by application, to teachers of college-level writing in the Boston area. This year and last year, several BC FWS instructors participated in these workshops, including this year's institute held at U Mass Boston. Jess Pauszek is the 2024 Keynote BRAWN Speaker. In May 2018 and June 2019, the Boston College First-Year Writing Program hosted the 7th and 8th. The institute, which has been supported with funds from MIT, Boston University, Northeastern, and U Mass Boston as well as Boston College, annually hosted 100 teachers of writing for two days with two keynote addresses by prominent local scholars (Neal Lerner from Northeastern and Tamera Marko from Emerson College in 2018; Jessica Restaino from Montclair State U in 2019) and 16 workshops on topics ranging from anti-racist assessment practices to visual learning strategies and designing effective writing prompts. Seven BC FWS faculty took part in the 2018 Institute, and eight attended the 2019 event.
- **Core Renewal** Through the Core Renewal Program, Paula Mathieu, FWS Director, taught an Enduring Questions paired course with Lisa Friedman in Educational Psychology, for Fall 2018 and fall 2019. The course, Writing for Social Action, pairs with social-science course on inequality in the US, to teach writing as a tool of inquiry and social transformation. Eileen Donovan-Kranz taught another pilot, Writing as Activism, open to students in the PULSE and other service programs. By reflecting on these pilot courses, the FWS Program will seek

more ways that students might engage in meaningful writing and the course's relationship to the core overall.

- **Streamlined Mission Statement** In Spring 2017, working with Julian Bourg, Dean of the Core, the FWS Program wrote a new mission statement, to share the goals of the program widely:
 - *The FWS Program invites students to explore why one writes, in order to help them see writing as an intellectual and personal tool for living that can be developed and honed. Writing-core courses ask students to write and rewrite in a variety of genres, discuss their works-in-progress in class, and receive individualized feedback from their instructors. Classroom activities center around the ways writing and revising help reveal new insights, orient ourselves to broader conversations, deepen our ability to communicate with others, express what is important to us, and create changes in service of the common good.*
- **Focus on Critical Reading and Writing.** In our 2013-2015 writing assessment, we found that students were engaging in critical reading and writing fairly well but could use improvement in putting themselves into conversation with sources and ideas of other writers. Since 2014, we have adopted new approaches to teaching and mentoring new instructors, drawing specifically on Joseph Harris's *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*, to focus on helping students work critically and creatively with the words and ideas of others. In 2015, we formally added a requirement to FWS: At least one assignment should ask students to work critically with an academic text and put it into conversation with other texts and ideas.

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