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Writing in Action: Scholarly Writing Groups as Faculty Development

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The authors trace the five-year development and implementation of scholarly writing groups at a public, teaching-oriented university. They describe the experiences and outcomes of faculty writers via the personal accounts of three participants, presented through the lenses of the directors of the University Writing Center and the Center for Faculty Innovation (CFI). Using modest resources, writing groups thrive because they efficiently serve all stakeholders: faculty members get much needed support for their scholarly writing; facilitators (writing center professionals) learn about writing across disciplines; the CFI meets its mission of supporting faculty scholarship, and the university benefits from an enhanced academic culture. Another outcome is helping faculty identify with student experiences and, as a result, improving teaching and writing across the curriculum.

> Professors write things. If they don't write things, they don't get to be professors. Yet few professors experience themselves as "writers." (Elbow & Sorcinelli, 2006, p. 19)

Action speaks louder than words. When it comes to writing, faculty development ultimately means doing: putting words to paper. Our insti-

tution has developed an effective strategy for enhancing writing in and across disciplines—not through conventional faculty development presentations or curriculum reform, but rather by educating and supporting faculty members directly, as scholarly writers.

This article traces the five-year development and implementation of scholarly writing groups at our public, teaching-oriented university. We describe the experiences and outcomes of faculty writers via the qualitative personal accounts of three participants, presented through the lenses of the directors of the Center for Faculty Innovation (CFI) and the University Writing Center. (Altogether, these perspectives represent science, social science, and humanities disciplines.) Using modest resources, writing groups have thrived because they efficiently serve all stakeholders: Faculty members get much-needed support for scholarly writing; facilitators (writing center professionals) learn about writing across disciplines; the CFI meets its mission of supporting faculty scholarship, and the university benefits from an enhanced academic culture. Another outcome is helping faculty identify with student experiences and, as a result, improving teaching and writing across the curriculum.

Our program began as a partnership between the Center for Faculty Innovation, which facilitates faculty development initiatives across campus, and our University Writing Center, which sought to increase its presence across campus and expand its mission beyond helping mostly undergraduate student writers. To date, nearly 200 faculty scholars from over 40 different campus departments have participated in one or more programs.

We initiated scholarly writing groups in response to multiple exigencies, first of which was simply to support faculty scholarship. Like many teaching-oriented universities, ours had become increasingly focused on student success, with little deliberate or visible attention to our faculty's scholarly needs. Although our university employs highly effective means to retain and support students (for example, tutoring centers for writing and other disciplines), we have for some time neglected to create programs designed to support faculty growth and development.

The Center for Faculty Innovation (CFI) was founded, in part, to meet this need, but unlike some models of a center for teaching and learning, it had a broad mission to support the "whole" faculty member in roles related to teaching, scholarship, service, and leadership. Beginning gradually yet very purposefully, its early work focused on supporting faculty mostly as instructors (which was perceived by some faculty members as yet another means to support students). This emphasis certainly fit the primary teaching orientation of the institution and addressed one of the

often cited areas of need, preparing faculty for teaching, but the CFI was committed to expanding its services to develop the other two legs of the academic stool—scholarship and service.

Because the CFI, including the director, is staffed by faculty, we realized firsthand the importance as well as the challenge of maintaining a scholarly agenda. With a finger on the pulse of the needs of faculty, we were looking for effective and pragmatic ways to support scholarship, and this need quickly rose to the top of our strategic priorities. Through the gradual development of myriad programs and services, such as workshops and consulting, CFI established credibility with the faculty. Foundational principles, established when our Center was proposed, served to guide the development and implementation of our programs. These principles, which are clearly evident in the scholarly writing groups described in this article, include the following:

- *faculty-driven* programs, grounded in the needs and realities of faculty life;
- *faculty-friendly* timing, scheduling, and location of services;
- *confidentiality* related to enrollment, services provided, and outcomes;
- *professionally delivered* programs that model evidence-based practices and active learning;
- *mutually beneficial* services, with expectation that facilitators as well as participants will gain from the experience; and
- *networking and collaboration* with other individuals and units across campus in the provision of services, and an effort to complement rather than duplicate existing services as well as tap areas of expertise.

We intimately knew the challenges that many faculty faced related to their scholarship, including time constraints; other professional and personal distractions; teaching, teaching, and more teaching; not feeling supported in our professional writing; frustration with unmet goals; and isolation. We clearly understood that the expectations and scholarly habits established during doctoral work quickly faded or took a back seat to the daily pressures of teaching and service.

With the founding principles in mind, CFI brainstormed ways to

support faculty scholarship. We acknowledged not having the needed personnel or expertise to provide in-depth writing assistance to faculty. Thus, we looked for a collaborative partner and quickly made a realization: Who better to partner with than our University Writing Center, also directed by a faculty member? This was a model we recognized, understood, and fully endorsed. Credibility with faculty was essential, and a liaison with the Writing Center assured this critical element. It turned out to be a natural and mutually beneficial partnership between the two organizations and most importantly, provided a level of support to faculty that neither unit could provide alone.

Around the same time, the Writing Center underwent a major shift in its mission. The Center had for three decades been associated the English department, staffed by professional consultants who had no obligations for classroom teaching, service, or scholarship.

The university decided to transform the Center by replacing retiring veteran consultants with hybrid faculty who taught in the Writing department, consulted in the Center, and participated in service and scholarship, mirroring conventional instructional faculty across campus. These new faculty members sought to expand the mission of the Center beyond remedial undergraduate tutoring and to support excellence in writing by consulting with students, faculty, and staff across the university community. To change perceptions and bring attention to this new focus, the Writing Center faculty considered faculty consultations—and especially, these highly visible scholarly writing groups for faculty—to be the quickest means to affect perceptual change by winning the hearts and minds of faculty allies.

The Writing Center had two additional motives for working with faculty across campus, both related to supporting writing across disciplines. Although the Center's new association with the Writing department infused fresh expertise in writing studies (composition, rhetoric, creative writing, TESOL, and so forth), most of the Writing Center faculty still hailed from literary studies, which meant that they lacked extensive experience writing in other disciplines that the Center supports. Faculty writing groups seemed to be an efficient means for Writing Center faculty to learn more about discipline-specific academic writing from expert practitioners, creating a kind of reciprocity between writing consultants and the scholarly writers we serve.

We hoped that reciprocity would extend beyond the writing groups, as well. On a campus with no formal WAC/WID program, we also envisioned faculty writing groups as the first phase of a stealth WAC/WID campaign that would raise the level of conversations about writing across

campus, if not translate indirectly into more deliberate attention to writing excellence in curriculum and pedagogy. Since the groups employed Writing Center pedagogy, we also wanted to ensure that no faculty member would leave a writing group without knowing—without experiencing firsthand—what Writing Center help looks and feels like.

Certainly, faculty writing groups reflect the best practices of our field. Writing studies scholars have long recommended the benefits of writing groups (Elbow, 1973; Gere, 1987; Moss, Highberg, & Nicholas, 1988), as have professional writing consultants (Boice, 1990; Reeves, 2002; Silvia, 2007). Writing groups also enact our most successful WAC philosophies. McLeod (2001) suggests two "rules of thumb" for WAC facilitators: "Faculty should themselves write, and faculty should have opportunities to talk to each other about writing" (p. 159). In particular, she advocates interdisciplinary WAC activities because they enable faculty to "learn other modes of instruction by experiencing these modes themselves and understanding from the inside out" (p. 159) that "good writing" looks different in different disciplines, and, by extension, that their students are having to navigate various audiences with different ideas of what good writing looks like.

Program Design

Our first attempt to help faculty with scholarship began with a 90-minute workshop co-sponsored by the CFI and the Writing Center. This workshop was an extension of CFI's New Faculty Orientation and part of an ongoing series of practical workshops designed to meet the needs of new faculty at the institution. The University Writing Center initially chose to work with the CFI because we needed to borrow their credibility to get started; they were poised for organizational leadership and transformation, already enjoying the buy-in of both senior leadership (the provost) and a large portion of the faculty. Also, the CFI could provide much-needed logistical support (connections across campus, publicity, registration, space arrangements, materials, food, assistance with assessment and planning), which freed up our facilitators to do what they do best: deliver great instruction.

In the initial workshop, "Scholarly Writing: From Proposal to Publication," we assembled a round-table presentation featuring faculty representatives from each of our institution's six colleges. We handpicked freshly tenured faculty who had established a scholarly track record and whom we thought would be inspirational speakers. As with most CFI workshops, we delivered the same workshop twice (Thursday over

lunch and Friday over breakfast), with solid attendance (26 new faculty participants).

The workshop itself was simple. We began with an interactive portion, asking faculty groups to brainstorm about what obstacles to scholarly productivity they faced and what strategies seemed to help. Next, our round-table presenters each offered one specific hint for success and one resource they found useful (for example, a specific mentor or a book on writing). After the panelists spoke for a few minutes, we opened the floor for questions and discussion. Finally, college representatives met with faculty from their college to discuss any discipline-specific issues.

This first session generated several valuable outcomes: establishing a powerful, mutually beneficial partnership between the CFI and the University Writing Center; and creating a buzz about scholarly writing and about a new direction for the Writing Center (supporting writing excellence for everyone, not just students). The most useful, tangible result was information we collected about faculty needs—what seemed to help or hinder their scholarly productivity. As we forecasted, lack of time and structure was the most frequent complaint. Thus, collaboratively, we decided to offer our first writing groups the following semester.

These pilot writing groups were experimental, highly valuable for teaching us what worked and what to avoid in future iterations. The Writing Center director facilitated the group, and both he and the director of the CFI were also participant-observers throughout the experience. From the outset of our programming, we focused intensively on conducting formative assessment as participants; thus, in addition to the evaluation feedback provided at the end of the program, the directors could relate to and make suggestions for future improvements based on their own experiences and perceptions. Because these first sessions were so large (up to 20 participants), we made the mistake of treating them as we would a writing class: an enrollment of 20 "students" whom we would "teach" something about workshop methods, then break them into peer review groups, and so forth. We quickly learned that (1) faculty are not students, (2) large peer-review groups don't work, and (3) faculty in different stages of the writing process do not work well together—some were stuck in prewriting and either wanted to brainstorm or talk about how to get started, and those participants understandably irritated the faculty who had already completed manuscripts and wanted critical feedback. Also, we scheduled the groups to meet twice per month all semester, a rhythm that many faculty could not maintain. Faculty very much appreciated the book on scholarly writing that we provided and were intrigued as they worked with cross-disciplinary colleagues. We were somewhat sur-

prised at the number of faculty unaware of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) as a potential scholarly outlet or even as a source of inspiration for teaching in the discipline. Although we enjoyed some limited successes, attendance waned over the term, and we regrouped for the next iteration.

The following year, we broke ground on our first truly successful writing groups, streamlined to be smaller (six writers or less), more focused (one group for folks just starting a project, another for those who wanted to polish their manuscripts), and more concentrated (six sessions over six weeks). Here, one of our recurring participants describes the sessions from an insider's perspective.

Participating in Interdisciplinary Scholarly Writing Groups
Cindy Hunter

I joined a writing group because it was the right time for me. Being pre-tenure, I was under pressure to publish but not sure how to bring several incomplete projects to the "send" button. Invitations to participate in writing groups in previous semesters seemed intriguing, but either the meeting time was inconvenient or I was insecure about whether my projects were far enough along to complete within the suggested time frame. The need to produce writing now meant I had run out of excuses.

Peer pressure worked: Having a commitment to deliver a draft kept me accountable. Our group of four faculty writers met weekly, taking turns posting something for review. Sometimes what we posted was little more than an outline, but usually we posted drafts. We started in the fall with an initial commitment of six meetings with the Writing Center director, which we extended for two additional semesters of meetings on our own. Our facilitator convened us and gave structure and perspective to the initial gatherings, but after those first six meetings, we were on our own. We held each other responsible to produce.

As an interdisciplinary group with varying levels of writing experience, we overcame challenges on personal and group levels. I had to get over the insecurity of someone reading and critiquing my work and prepare to face up to a question about or objection to how I was using a concept or language. Others had to wrestle with my frequent suggestions for overall structural changes. We took the task seriously and agreed to be open to the feedback. Writing and rewriting drafts requires time not easily built into the regular workday, so the additional commitment to read someone else's work critically was a significant obligation that team members rose to differentially. During busier points in the semester, the academic rhythm is less forgiving of additional time commitments, so we had

to rise above disappointment when a draft did not draw as much feedback as we had hoped. Understanding that each participant's time would differ from week to week, our facilitator suggested that we use a Writing Center technique: Each writer would direct readers to areas of the manuscript or an angle where we most needed help, such as clarity, grammar, consistency in style, or presentation of data. We posted memos with our drafts that included directions for our readers: "If you only have 30 minutes, please look at. . . . If you have an hour. . . ." Overall, it was a friendly and engaging process.

Beyond scrutinizing each other's work, we discussed strategies to find the best journals for submission, and we encouraged each other to let go of our manuscript when it was time. Most importantly, we hit the submit button, and articles were accepted. Well, some were accepted, and even the ones that needed more revision were much further along in the process than they would have been otherwise. I was able to usher two articles to publication.

As a social worker, I learned about unfamiliar discipline-specific writing in health sciences, anthropology, and rhetoric. Everyone gained from copyediting and suggestions for clarity, but the benefits of our collaboration across colleges brought more benefits and challenges than we anticipated. I found it easiest to help the health sciences writer because her approach was closest to social work scholarship—gathering data on behaviors and making sense of it through disciplinary lenses. I found it more difficult to provide feedback to the anthropologist who was finishing her dissertation; her chapters were so detailed and technical that I had little ability to critique her writing. However, the health sciences group member was able to give both moral (she knew one of the committee members) and technical support. As an unexpected outcome, the rhetoric writer introduced me to academic writing that looked very different from my own—not even requiring a formal literature review. I found myself enjoying her writing and asking questions that helped her to clarify the teaching process she was trying to describe.

We discovered the value of naïve but intelligent questions posed by colleagues from other fields who care about your work. Group members pointed out my blind spots and helped me see sections of my manuscript that were confusing to readers. Although I was working on articles with co-authors who share similar insight to our profession, my writing benefited significantly from the challenge of explaining to colleagues outside my discipline why my research was important and what I wanted the reader to understand from my conclusions.

In-depth exploration of scholarly writing from across campus also increased my appreciation of what other fields offered. Ironically, I have never carefully nor critically read and re-reread either my own departmental colleagues' work or many articles in my own discipline's journals. The level at which I came to understand the other group members' research allowed me to improve my own scholarship, introduce colleagues to my group members' work, and even cite

their findings in the classroom. Learning, for example, that a major indicator for positive health was education (and not health insurance) became relevant as I talked to my students about healthcare reform and advocacy.

Writing groups also provided a model for collaborative success. Group work centered on goals that are meaningful to each participant is both productive and gratifying. Everyone gets an audience to hash through what the given piece of research really means. Small groups create a more intimate level of engagement across colleges. This is unparalleled in college or university committee work, where the issues at hand are mandated by the committee's agenda and not inherently significant to the individual members.

Writing-group experiences also got me thinking of myself as a writer, connected to a wider community of writers. So when the CFI and the same Writing Center person convened a new, week-long Writer's Boot Camp (which we faculty lovingly refer to as writer's "prison"), I saw this as another opportunity to get words on paper as well as a space to reconnect with that community. Several colleagues and I have become regular prisoners! The facilitator has become a "go to" person for writing questions. When we meet by chance on campus, the conversation leads to writing and publishing. Nobody else on campus outside of my former writer's group members asks about that aspect of my work with a genuine interest to know and nudge it along. Having a writing adviser and relationships with other faculty based on scholarship reinforces my identity as scholarly writer, and increases my job satisfaction.

My renewed scholarly success has also influenced how I now teach writing. For example, by encouraging my students to submit their class papers to student publications, I hope to change their notions of scholarly writing as an unattainable hurdle reserved for "professional" authors. Recently, I co-authored a paper with an undergraduate student group who produced information useful for my field students and supervisors. Writing and publishing the article together helped the students to identify themselves as writers. I could not have encouraged them so effectively without the practice I gained of articulating constructive feedback in the scholarly writing groups.

The personal connection to the Writing Center cannot be overstated. On a large campus with 1,000-plus faculty, one or more faculty members in a department with a strong personal link to the Writing Center keeps the Center in the forefront of resource referral with advisees, students, and other faculty. The central position of Writing Center staff encourages cross-pollination of disciplines, creative suggestions for collaboration, and thoughtful, genuine feedback on current practices.

As Cindy testifies, interdisciplinary groups have worked very well for most participants because they met writers' primary needs—structure,

motivation, and accountability. Supportive feedback and "ignorant but intelligent" questions proved useful for helping most writers make progress with revisions. From the facilitator's perspective, the groups were simple: We established some ground rules about how the groups would work and then modeled Writing Center-style response and interaction, giving writers the responsibility for defining what kinds of help they wanted from the group. We continue to facilitate these interdisciplinary groups successfully; however, as Lincoln Gray explains in the following narrative, we have also developed discipline-specific review groups. Lincoln, who is an experienced researcher in communication sciences, also reaffirms the notion that scholarly writing groups are not remedial but rather exist because all scholars need help writing.

Toward a Community of Empirical Scholarly Writers
Lincoln Gray

I am a senior scientist who has published over 60 peer-reviewed journal articles and about 20 less rigorously reviewed publications such as book chapters, invited reviews, and patents. I have had 29 years of federal biomedical research funding. I worked for over 25 years at medical schools before coming to this primarily undergraduate university. Yet I feel like a novice writer. Writing has never come easily for me. I write computer programs more easily than I compose prose. I needed help to get a backlog of papers published and, hopefully, to write more successful research grants before the end of my career. Thus, I eagerly joined scholarly writers groups at my new job.

I began in an interdisciplinary group, where I discovered how writers in very different disciplines can help each other. A scholar writing about popular narrative, for example, posed some questions that helped a scientist realize that he had not stated a very basic assumption. Although we learned the value of participating in a writing community and of uninformed but well-intended questions, we also discovered that too much disciplinary diversity could create an inefficient group for specialized research writing. Most obviously, the humanities scholars in our group did not share the scientists' view of the need for empirical evidence to support important conclusions. "Do you mean that you can't just state an opinion?" one humanities colleague asked. Some of the writers didn't share my zeal for statistical methods to quantify the probability that a conclusion might be false, or possess an understanding of effect sizes.

So, at my suggestion, the CFI and University Writing Center conducted an experiment to group scholarly writers according to broad disciplinary perspectives. We envisioned a dichotomy between what might roughly be termed the empirical or STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and

the more qualitative or liberal arts disciplines. Describing these distinctions accurately was difficult at first, but when faculty writers assembled, it seemed clear who should go into which group. Having participated in several mixed-discipline groups previously, I agreed to facilitate a group of empirical writers.

Empirical writers share a common language of statistics and the standards of causation. We recognize both deductive and inductive approaches. Despite diverse disciplines and the different writing styles (such as APA, AMA, Chicago, Vancouver, NIH, NSF) that we might have in working or fading memory, we all share a sense of how to construct an empirical argument (abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion, implications for practice, and future research) or a research proposal (specific aims, significance, innovation, and approach). We all share a belief that our data should "tell the story." We share deeply trained admonitions about not extrapolating conclusions beyond an unbiased and objective assessment of the data.

Yet scientific writing is difficult and not nearly as much fun as doing experiments. Diligence through drudgery is required. The formal standards of scientific writing often seem constraining. Many of us need support, advice, and (often artificially imposed) deadlines to get our ideas submitted for publication. But writing with a group turned out to be, well, fun. Scientists love to talk about their data. Such debates are often the reason we chose an empirical discipline from the beginning. I remember the admonition of my mentor—that when you think you are done with an experiment (that is, the data are collected and analyzed, and you know that you have both statistical and scientific significance and have made some graphs of the data that you are eager to display)—you really are only half done. It takes about an equal amount of effort from that moment of elation when you know you "have got something good" until the manuscript is formally accepted.

The first group of empirical (STEM) writers consisted of a cognitive psychologist, a social psychologist, a geologist, a behavioral neuroscientist, and a pharmacologist. Our scholarship involved topics as diverse as behavior of babies, student perceptions of discrimination, levels of thinking in on-line course discussions, interpretations of processes deep within the earth from stones that came up with ancient volcanoes, and peer-review in problem-based-learning. Reading each other's scholarship, our small group could quickly pinpoint the critical issues. We would argue about the need for an analysis of variance (ANOVA) versus a multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) and attempt to remember details. Confusions from other scientists sharpened explanations and helped us to avoid jargon.

For five consecutive weeks in the middle of the semester, we met in our disciplinary cluster groups for 90 minutes to review our scholarship. Participants were expected to arrive with a sense of what they wanted to write and, most typically,

have something started or in need of revision. We strove for groups of about four writers with one facilitator. The first meeting involved introductions, separation into small working groups (STEM or humanities writers clustered together), and, finally, a decision of who would "go first" in each group. We would then leapfrog peer reviews: Before the following meeting, half of the small group posted their drafts, to be reviewed and discussed at the next meeting; then the other half posted their work, which were read and critiqued at the third meeting. We repeated that cycle again so that everyone had a chance to revise, post, and receive a second round of comments. Thus, each writer had a two-week turnaround time to revise before the end of the session. This is a demanding but doable schedule for full-time faculty, though we all thought that the effort could not be sustained for more than a few weeks. All participants expressed a belief that they would never have gotten the writing done without the agreed-upon deadlines within our group. Many said that the deadlines forced them to create something that turned out to be a lot better than what would have happened without the group.

Our best debates were about how best to "tell the story": whether the argument should be contained in one paper or two; how much to include; which statistical methodology to use; the best way to graph data; what are the appropriate conclusions; how much to "stretch" the discussion; how to be concise yet deliver the message with "punch"; and so forth. It was exhilarating to work together. And, despite my anxiety as a self-perceived struggling writer, I found it surprisingly easy to lead the group. Again, the give-and-take of scientific debate was something we enjoyed and were trained to do. Ideas of what the other writers should do came easily to me (even though this is surprisingly difficult for me to do with my own writing).

Our group didn't meet long enough to deal with the rejections that often follow submission. This is probably where we could all use the continued support of our scholarly writers' community. Reviews can be demoralizing. Scholarly writers don't typically share news of our rejected manuscripts, so it is easy to personalize a criticism (even from journals that publish only a small fraction of submitted papers). I am beginning to think we should adopt the attitude that the "batting average" of a scientific writer should be about that of a professional baseball hitter: Twenty-five percent is not so bad; you should start to worry only when you are below 10% for a while. It is equally important for us all to learn to keep trying to get a hit—despite a few strike-outs.

Participating in and, especially, facilitating a writing group also sharpens the skills needed for teaching and learning. Having quickly to digest and competently respond to colleagues' draft arguments reminds us, as faculty, what it is like to be a student approaching a new topic. This humbling process of struggling to help colleagues write builds the skills necessary to help both our students and ourselves. Learning about colleagues' scholarship enables us to experience the

same process of lifelong learning that we seek for our students.

I can summarize the results of my writing group experiences as follows:

- *Successful writing is very difficult and time consuming;*
- *Writing in a community is productive and fun;*
- *Thinking about others' writing can help you think about your own; and*
- *Because of the nature of empirical writing (a need to understand standards of evidence and statistics), it can be more efficient to write with others from similar disciplines.*

Lincoln's experiment with a small, disciplinary-focused peer review group yielded such excellent results that it made sense for the CFI and Writing Center to consider other kinds of intensive experiences that might benefit scholarly writers. Several faculty members had suggested that we provide more concentrated time for writing as part of the May Symposium, a weeklong series of faculty development activities held between graduation and the first session of summer school. This week and its emphasis on professional development for faculty was quickly becoming an important part of the University's culture. Together we decided to run a scholarly writing "boot camp," inviting faculty simply to join us in the library for a four-day writing marathon. We paid careful attention to finding a comfortable, conducive location with technology access; providing sustenance; and having both Writing Center and library assistance available. As with our other programs, we sent participants e-mail explanations and guidelines to help them prepare for and make sense of their experiences. Below is a sample e-mail from the first day of Boot Camp that describes the program's intent:

> *Dear colleagues,*
>
> *Again, welcome to this week's Scholarly Writing Boot Camp! Each day, I'll send out some notes about what we're doing and where we might go from here. Today, I want to discuss the issue of pacing.*
>
> *Many of our students claim that they do their best writing at the last minute. Looming deadlines generate enough adrenaline to inspire—or so they say.*
>
> *As experienced writers, we know better: that binge writing typically doesn't enable our best work; that a first draft is only a beginning; that working against a deadline can help us finish, but only a sustained revision process will produce writing worth reading.*

> *For most of us, the sprint-and-drift cycle cannot sustain long-term scholarly excellence. Extensive research on scholarly writing indicates that the scholarly turtle always wins the race.*
>
> *So, why are we binge-writing this week? Why am I encouraging a seemingly bad habit? Because this week you're probably not writing against a deadline. Because to sustain a better writing process, you won't find time to write; you need to make time. And because sometimes you need concentrated time to focus—especially when you've just finished your academic year and have plenty of great things to write about—whenever time allows.*
>
> *Whether you use this week to free-write your thoughts without constraint, or to revise a manuscript, or to devise a new research plan, your investment will pay off.*
>
> *Good luck, and keep me posted on your progress. . . .*
>
> *Kurt*

Daily follow-up e-mails delivered encouragement and hints for writing (such as how to free-write or compose inquiries to potential publishers) that participants could read at their own pace.

Through CFI's strategic initiatives to continue to support faculty scholarship," the May Symposium Boot Camp was also morphed into a January Symposium two-day Lock Down, which occurred prior to the start of the spring semester. We soon discovered that Boot Camps and Lock Downs provide the most cost-effective and popular format for scholarly writing groups, as one faculty participant, Nancy Poe, explains next.

Scholarly Writing Boot Camps and Lock-Downs
Nancy Poe

Late last spring, I received official notification from my university's Board of Visitors that I had successfully achieved tenure and promotion. I *made it!*

Two short years ago—four years along my tenure "track"—the likelihood for this successful outcome was bleak, if not outright implausible, due to my failure to establish an adequate publication record. As is true for many, if not most, junior faculty at "teaching universities," I enjoyed significant supervision and mentoring around the expectations of my position related to course load and how things were going with students in the classroom. In the service arena, I was situated in a small department with a culture that placed heavy demands on each faculty member. From the very beginning, I assumed multiple committee assignments across the department-college-university spectrum, and I was working to establish

connections for involvement beyond the university to meet explicit expectations that I actively contribute my professional expertise in agencies and organizations, consistent with the ethics of my discipline. While "scholarly activity" was expected—nay, required—time for it was not meaningfully accommodated, much less protected, in terms of faculty load or institutional attention.

I was successfully managing a 4:4 teaching load with strong student evaluations. I was advising 30 students in my major and fulfilling a demanding service commitment. Coincidentally, my department was also undergoing its national reaccreditation process during the second and third years of my tenure track (self-study compilation and external examination, respectively). Needless to say, structural attention and priorities were diverted to maintaining institutional profile and integrity and were not necessarily on supporting the scholarly agendas of individual faculty members. As I contemplated my tenure clock within this context, and in light of timeframes for journal review and publication dates, I realized it was make-or-break time in terms of submitting manuscripts. I needed to get busy writing, fast!

That's when I applied to one of our CFI's initiatives: the Scholarly Writing Boot Camp, a week-long workshop to support faculty members in their writing efforts. The application for participation required candidates to identify a writing project that was "in process," to describe its current stage of development, and to establish a specific goal/outcome for Boot Camp. I found the application to be important in a number of ways: It set a tone that the week was for serious writing; it "forced" me to focus attention and effort on a particular project and establish specific goals; and it served to create a type of culture, as all the participants had to do some advance planning and, as such, were primed to approach the week committed to real work and measureable accomplishments. Without the application, I believe the climate of Boot Camp would have been much more casual and far less productive.

There wasn't much more to it, really. Boot Camp simply gathered faculty members from various departments and disciplines with a simple agenda: "Write!" For seven hours a day, we had space, time, and support for our scholarly writing (even light breakfast and lunch fare were provided). Peer review was built into Boot Camp, not as a programmed aspect of the experience, but as an option for those who wished to participate.

We convened in a spacious room outfitted with worktables, Wi-Fi, comfortable seating areas, and an adjacent computer lab. The CFI director and our facilitator welcomed us on the first morning and led short introductions, during which each participant identified her or his disciplinary home and briefly articulated the project(s) and goals for the week. After that, we "manned our stations" and got to work.

Periodically, the facilitator would circulate to check in with each writer. Over

the course of the week, he sent occasional e-mails to provide writing tips or words of encouragement. Otherwise, he left us alone to do our writing—in a room with 20 other people who were left alone to do their writing. One of the participants commented on this aspect of the experience, observing that, even though writing is an intensely individual and intrinsically isolating endeavor, Boot Camp provided "community" within that isolation.

For me, one of the most powerfully motivating aspects of Boot Camp was an odd environmental/sensory factor. While sitting at my station in the computer lab, I could hear the tapping of my colleagues' keyboards, and, from my vantage point, I could look around and see the monitors of fellow writers filling with text. These sounds and sights served as good modeling and gentle nudges for me to start tapping and get words on my screen!

At the end of Boot Camp week, I had not quite accomplished my goal of completing a manuscript draft. I had, however, made remarkable progress. Perhaps more importantly, I felt as though I had finally gained some traction in scholarship. Boot Camp momentum carried into the following weeks, and I completed and submitted the article. Within a few months, my manuscript was accepted with only minor revisions.

Since that initial experience, I have enthusiastically participated in several Boot Camps. In fact, Boot Camp, now offered every May and January, is an eagerly anticipated highlight of my academic calendar. While there have been some refinements in the program, the general format and culture remain unchanged. Its simplicity works for me!

In the most recent Boot Camp, I discovered a new value and opportunity that it offers: providing a space for collaborative/co-authoring work to take place. I entered with a colleague/co-author, and the week provided a sort of "retreat" for us to hash out our ideas and get them down on paper. There's something valuable—and really gratifying—about being in the same-place-at-the-same-time with a co-author that cannot be replaced with online collaborative applications and e-mail. Drafting together is quite different from the back-and-forth of sharing drafts and providing feedback.

The writing that I completed in the Boot Camps has translated into additional submitted manuscripts, additional reviews, and additional acceptances (as well as rejections and revise-and-resubmits). I credit Boot Camp for providing the structure and support that I needed to do the writing required for my tenure review to result in a successful outcome. And, as I commented in my opening, I received official notification from my university's Board of Visitors that I had successfully achieved tenure and promotion. I made it!

Measuring Results

We began our summative assessment with bean-counting (how many faculty members from how many departments engaged in how many hours of instruction) blended with self-reported satisfaction measures. Since we began facilitating faculty writing groups, we also have surveyed participants to collect formative assessment that would help us improve our programming—everything from suggestions for discipline-focused groups to ready access to coffee. More recently, we surveyed writers to determine how successful they were with their scholarship because of participation in the writing groups. Respondents indicated a 65% acceptance rate for submissions; this seems a higher than average rate, but we have no yardstick to compare acceptance rates across disciplines.

Regardless of what these publication rates mean, faculty members consistently validate the importance of participation. The most important factors, in order of significance, include focus (dedicated time away from department/office/classroom duties), mutual accountability, increased motivation, feedback from colleagues, enhanced collegiality, and attention to the writing process. Qualitative evidence has been more persuasive than any other data; as one writer told us, "Writing groups have deepened my attention to the writing process, enhanced my understanding of myself as a writer, and, of course, increased my productivity. Writing seems like less of a chore because of scholarly writing groups."

More recently, we have sought evidence of how participation in Scholarly Writing Groups affects classroom teaching, though, as others have recognized (Felton, Moore, & Strickland, 2009), such impact is difficult to measure. Still, nearly a third of participants indicate that scholarly writing groups have influenced the way they teach or talk about writing with their students. Specifically, writers noted

- a reaffirmation of collaborative writing techniques. For example" "We discuss the value of peer editing and I relate my own experiences as an example of how valuable peer feedback can be"; "[The writing groups] re-informed my commitment to having writers speak to other writers in small groups."
- increased empathy with student writers. For example: "Being an active researcher/writer puts me in the same 'boat' as they are with the frustrations they face."
- enhanced, explicit emphasis on the writing process in their classrooms. For example: "We discuss the chal-

> lenges with writing responsibly, with not waiting till the last minute to write, and setting aside time to write"; "It has inspired me to talk more about writing and to give students more positive feedback. I still mark their errors, but I have tried to shift my focus to the good ideas and how to build on them"; "[I now] provide more examples and recognize different types of writing for different purposes."

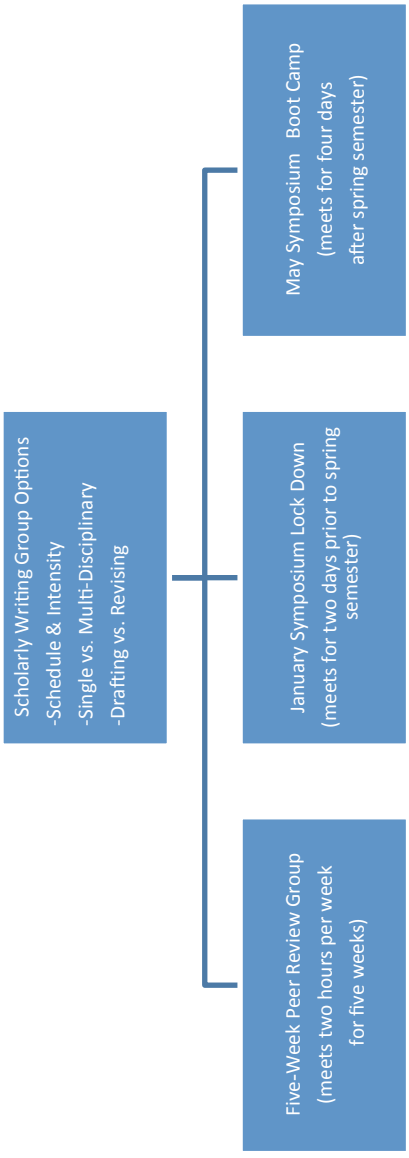
Our anecdotal results have been corroborated by Cindy, Lincoln, and Nancy's narratives above, and by accounts of others who facilitate faculty writing groups at campuses elsewhere (Elbow & Sorcinelli, 2006; Felten, Moore, & Strickland, 2009; Lindsey, McIlvenna, & Twill, 2010; Mezeske, 2008). These other programs offer variations on faculty writing groups in diverse contexts, but they substantiate similar results: increased motivation and productivity for low to moderate cost.

Perhaps the greatest pedagogical impact of scholarly writing groups has been on the Writing Center itself. Like most writing centers, our Center mostly hires professional consultants with disciplinary backgrounds in the humanities. By facilitating and participating in interdisciplinary writing groups, Writing Center staff continue to learn about discipline-specific writing from the experts whose students we tutor. In writing group discussions, we often ask our colleagues about the styles and genres they use: What does a good thesis look like in political science? What kinds of evidence "count" in kinesiology? Do engineers and scientists really prefer passive verb constructions? Our colleagues' answers help us to decode disciplinary conventions for their students—and we think these discussions help our colleagues more clearly explain their disciplines' implicit rules in their own classrooms. We have integrated these lessons to our peer tutor education by teaching apprentice tutors how to study and teach diverse styles and conventions. Finally, we now recognize the need to import cross-disciplinary expertise into our Center by recruiting professional consultants and tutors from different academic fields.

To replicate these results elsewhere, we recommend (1) experimenting with a variety of scholarly support activities; (2) partnering with other campus experts, such as the writing center or WAC program; and (3) establishing robust formative assessment from the outset. The participant narratives above affirm the value of options with variable scheduling, intensity, purpose, and criteria for group formation, as illustrated in Figure 1.

With our colleagues across campus, we have successfully contributed to transforming the real mission, and as importantly, the perceived mission,

Figure 1
Writing Group Configurations



of the CFI and University Writing Center. Most importantly, we have filled a vacuum by supporting our faculty's intellectual work and contributed to the enhancement of our academic culture.

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