Review of *Working with Faculty Writers*

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Anne Ellen Galler and Michele Eodice, Eds. *Working with Faculty Writers.* Utah State UP, 2013.

In WAC studies, working with faculty and graduate writers is an exciting new frontier. Faculty writers work under difficult circumstances: the stakes of writing are high, as is the temptation for procrastination, and writing resources are often informal or underdeveloped. Whether initiatives to support faculty writers originate in writing centers or centers for faculty development, the novelty of such programs has the potential to define this new field of faculty writing support. In *Working with Faculty Writers* (*WWFW*), Anne Ellen Geller and Michele Eodice compile diverse voices to set the groundwork of this new field.

The diversity of contributors is one of the strengths of the book. More than forty authors contribute more-or-less evenly, representing WAC programs, writing centers, and faculty centers for teaching and learning—as well as disciplinary participants from veterinary science (Virginia Fajt), mathematics (Jill Zarestky), and ecology (Manuel Colunga-Garia). Readers familiar with composition will find some very well-known names among the contributors, such as Chris Anson and Bob Boice, but there are also perspectives from within the disciplines, from graduate students, and from adjunct faculty. The broad base of contributors emphasizes the book's primary claim: institutions of higher learning need to create writing communities that cut across disciplines, ranks, and seniority. *WWFW* argues pervasively and persuasively that creating such a community is well worth a university's investment of resources.

Geller and Eodice, along with their contributors, have created a foundational text for creating faculty writing programs, one that will be drawn upon by more and more institutions seeking to expand into this area. The contributors to *WWFW* recognize that to define a new field is risky, and scholars in the field need to dispel some prevalent academic writing myths while being careful to side-step the creation of new ones.

If there is one myth that haunts academic writing the most, it is the neo-romantic view of solitary, self-contained writing. While writing studies scholars, especially those of us in writing centers, have long recognized the need for community-supported writing, there persists in academia—as Lori Salem and Jennifer Follet mention in their chapter, "The Idea of a Faculty Writing Center"—"the romantic image of a writer who works alone in a garret creating his masterpiece" (70). The same teachers who encourage group projects and visits to the writing center for their students

may find themselves alone in an office, not knowing where to get feedback or even just a conversation about their writing. Instead, as Trixie G. Smith et al. point out in a chapter titled "Developing a Heuristic for Multidisciplinary Faculty Writing Groups," they may feel like "isolated writer[s], alone in the academic tower" (182). *WWFW* proposes a different model for academic production. In practically every chapter, as in Lori Salem and Jennifer Follett's "The Idea of a Faculty Writing Center," the contributors assert that "the university and individual faculty members can and should productively collaborate on writing projects" (65).

The forms that these collaborations take are in some ways as diverse as the programs and facilitators sponsoring them. They can take place in a variety of settings and with a range of costs and interventions. Brian Baldi, Mary Dean Sorcinelli, and Jung H. Yun, in their chapter "The Scholarly Writing Continuum," present a sliding scale from very low-structure, low-commitment and low-contact offerings like providing faculty with "a room of their own" away from colleagues and office distractions, all the way to intensive multi-week workshops and writing coaches (43–46). Within *WWFW*, there are so many descriptions of "how we do it here" that almost any institution will find ways to strengthen their community of writers, regardless of institute size or faculty buy-in. There are many ways to provide support, showing faculty writers they are not left alone to founder through their writing projects.

The second myth that new faculty writing programs must work to dispel is that only tenure track faculty need to be engaged in writing. Letizia Guglielmo and Lynée Gaillet relate how, with resources and support, contingent faculty can form on-campus communities, contribute to their fields and share their experiences, especially of teaching, with a wider audience through scholarly production. Elena Mari-Adkins Garcia, Seunghee Eum, and Lorna Watt similarly find that graduate students who are given university-sponsored places to get and give feedback on writing are more likely to establish professional confidence, work in multidisciplinary modes and finish their dissertations: "We know that coursework is not where students get stuck," they dryly acknowledge (274–75).

The third myth claims that the only writing the university supports are those projects that lead immediately to academic publication. In fact, university-supported programs don't have to just include writing, but academic production in general. Violet Dutcher relates how among the abundant fruits of her university's scholarly writing retreat was a 36" by 48" oil painting created by a member of the art department (150). Providing a space to focus, discuss academic production aims, and give meaningful feedback can result in a variety of projects across the disciplines. Community, improved teaching, and creativity can also be outcomes of university-sponsored retreats and workshops, but maybe one of the greatest outcomes is for faculty to develop new identities.

Despite the importance of dispelling the myth of writing as a solitary practice engaged in only by tenure-track faculty who are exclusively seeking academic publication, the authors of this groundbreaking collection are in the difficult position of not creating new myths. The contributors want to stress the importance of writing skills, good habits, and strong communities, but these practices also tend to create a lot of writing, a lot of good writing, and a lot of publications. Good practices lead to good product, but university writing support should focus primarily on the process, on empowering writers. The temptation for many of the authors in this collection is to focus on the outcomes of working with faculty: crudely put, the increase in publication.

This is a good thing. Faculty members want to get published. University administrations want faculty members to get published. More publications mean more faculty achieve tenure and rank-promotion, and publications raise the profile not only of individual academics, but the university as a whole. Of course, they also increase the pool of relevant research being done in their respective disciplines. But, more cynically, publications are often seen as the coin of the realm in academia. Faculty members and administrators both want to increase publications. The stakes are high for everyone.

Surely with such high stakes, university buy-in to faculty writing support would be high and wouldn't it be easy for WPAs to argue that such programs result in more publications, which everyone wants? Yes, but. Salem and Follett are among the few contributors who explicitly recognize the hazards of focusing on the productivity of writing practices. They point out that if faculty writing support is seen as a product-driven, remedial service, then the same biases that have dogged undergraduate writing centers will extend to these new programs (63–64). Far better, they argue, to model student writing centers' insistence on creating "a place where writing can be transparently discussed and regularly practiced" (66) instead of focusing solely on publication. The subtext in Salem and Follett's article is the thirty-year-old rallying cry of writing center practice: "Better writers, not better [or more] writing!"

Ideally, faculty writers should feel as though writing is a sort of fulfillment of who they are, reflective of habits of thinking and working that are deeply intrinsic to their identities as writers, not something contingent on a single piece's success. It is just this identity that is highlighted by William P. Banks and Kerri B. Flinchbaugh's chapter "Experiencing Ourselves as Writers," where they point out that although most faculty members write often for their professional identities, they may still have a hard time recognizing themselves as *writers*. Ideally, writing programs would posit writing as much a part of each participant's identity as teaching and research. Such a change in identity requires far more than simply helping someone over the hurdles of tenure review.

The basis of faculty writing programs—with all respect to our colleagues' own content and generic expertise—is educational. Student writing services must reiterate to students and administration that our goals are not to create good papers or good grades, and, similarly, faculty writing services will have to fight against the assumption that the right workshop or writing group will guarantee publications. We can't make that promise to faculty members and we can't make that promise to the administrations that fund us.

Still, it's hard to ignore the economic realities. Tara Gray, A. Jane Birch, and Laura Madson in their chapter "How Teaching Centers Can Support Faculty as Writers" describe the institutional advantages when receiving "excellent reports [. . .] from college deans and department chairs" about the benefits of such programs (103). And I was very satisfied to see the results of Jessie L. Moore, Peter Felton, and Michael Strickland's faculty writing residency outcomes: more than half of participants complete their writing goals and ninety-five percent of those who finish the residency go on to publish their projects (135–37). That's fantastic news, not to be downplayed, but when the authors encourage directors to focus exclusively on productivity, there are latent dangers. Focusing on the number of products completed or published rather than creating sustained writing identities might create an unfair burden on the administrators of such writing programs to help every writer achieve publication, when such decisions are beyond the facilitator's ability. Just as writing centers can't promise an *A* to every student who walks in our doors, neither can faculty writing programs promise publications; both student and faculty services, however, can be attentive to best practices for creating sustained writing practices and identities.

Faculty writing support is still a relatively new concept, and *WWFW* represents the opening of a door that will, no doubt, lead down paths of new research for faculty writing programs. The volume will doubtless be cited in future publications as the field develops. Until that time, the practices described in *WWFW* demonstrate how versatile the new field can be. The wide variety of methods and spaces of intervention are enlightening not only for WPAs who would want to start their own faculty writing support program, but also for theorists in writing studies and writing in the disciplines.

Right now the research is mostly in the "This is how we do it here" phase, the same phase that early freshmen composition research went through in the fifties and sixties, where each isolated program reached out for each other, coalescing around best practices, building a base for future research. This book marks the beginning of what will no doubt be a fruitful field of inquiry for writing scholars who turn the microscope inward and wonder, How do we write the way we do in academia?

Contributors

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Sue Doe is Associate Professor of English at Colorado State University. She does research in three distinct areas—academic labor and the faculty career, writing across the curriculum, and student-veteran transition in the post-9/11 era. Coauthor of the faculty development book *Concepts and Choices: Meeting the Challenges in Higher Education*, she has published articles in *College English* and *WPA: Writing Program Administration* as well as in several book-length collections. Her recent collection on student-veterans in the Composition classroom, *Generation Vet: Composition, Veterans, and the Post-911 University,* co-authored with Professor Lisa Langstraat, was published by Utah State University Press (an imprint of the University Press of Colorado) in 2014.

Dr. Jason E. Dowd is currently a postdoctoral associate in the Department of Biology at Duke University, where he is involved in interdisciplinary science education research with Dr. Julie Reynolds. He is interested in understanding how scientific writing may shed light on both students' scientific reasoning and differences in epistemic beliefs across disciplines. Dr. Dowd earned his AB in physics at Washington University in St. Louis and his PhD in the Department of Physics at Harvard University, where his research focused on the interpretation of assessments of student learning in the introductory physics classroom and laboratory.

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classroom and relationships between graduate teaching assistants pedagogical content knowledge, teaching, and professional development.

Travis Grandy is a doctoral candidate at the University of Massachusetts Amherst where he serves as Assistant Director of Writing Across the Curriculum for the University Writing Center. His research focuses on writing program administration, discourse, and ideology, and his current work examines WAC administration as situated practice within the framework of institutional ethnography. He has presented his work at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and Computers and Writing, and has also written for GradHacker on Inside Higher Ed.

Mary Hedengren studies how writers inhabit new roles, from new freshmen to new graduate students to members of new disciplines. Her work has appeared in *Present Tense*, *New Writing,* and *Harlot.* She received her PhD in rhetoric at the University of Texas, Austin in 2015 and currently teaches at the University of Houston--Clear Lake.

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Carol Rutz has directed the Carleton Writing Program since 1997. As an early WAC institution, Carleton's program features faculty development and writing assessment as well as a curriculum rich in writing opportunities for students. Her research interests include response to student writing, writing assessment, and assessment of faculty development. With others, she is a co-author of *Faculty Development and Student Learning: Assessing the Connections* (Indiana UP, 2016).

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