



BOSTON COLLEGE

Writing Fellows Program

Pilot Project:



Year-One Progress Report 2004-2005

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Executive Summary

In 2004, Dr. Paula Mathieu and the Writing Fellows Team (WF Team) created a pilot Writing Fellows Program at Boston College to test if this initiative could enhance the teaching and learning of writing on campus without changing curricula or class sizes. The Writing Fellows concept makes trained graduate or undergraduate writing fellows available to a faculty member in any discipline wanting to focus more attention on writing and revision in their courses. Throughout the semester, fellows meet individually with students to offer feedback on drafts of written work prior to students' handing it in to faculty for grading. The writing fellows receive training in responding to student writing and in the rhetorical expectations of the specific discipline and writing assignment. This initiative responds to a broadly perceived need among administrators, faculty and students to make writing more central to all fields of study in higher education.

With \$14,860 from a Boston College Teaching, Advising and Mentoring Grant (TAM), a pilot program began in 2004 to test the feasibility of a Writing Fellows Initiative at BC, and to create a prototype for a fully realized Writing Fellows program at this university. The WF Team selected one course with which to initially partner: Dr. Paul Gray's Comparative Social Change (SC093) a core Sociology course with an enrollment of 60 students. We selected four Writing Fellows, incoming English MA students, who subsequently went through training in reading and responding to student writing. Throughout the semester, the Writing Fellows sat in on Dr. Gray's course and met regularly with the Writing Fellows Team to discuss the program and ways to better serve the students. The semester following the pilot, the WF Team visited two large, successful Writing Fellows Programs at Brown and Tufts Universities, as well as interviewed students, faculty and the writing fellows to test the value of the one-course pilot and discover ways to create a fully realized Writing Fellows program.

Research into the effectiveness of the pilot is anecdotal, but strongly positive. Dr. Gray felt there were "more As and fewer C" papers than in previous semesters of the course. Seventy-two percent of the students in the course responded that the program provided a useful resource; the majority of the remaining students admitted they did not take full advantage of the resource.

The BC Writing Fellows Initiative has received a second year of TAM funding and will test a revised Writing Fellows pilot in three new courses in different disciplines: History, Political Science and Geology. We plan several modifications to the Year-Two Pilot, which we believe will not only increase its effectiveness, but most importantly, will not accrue additional costs. All "fellowed" courses will include at least three writing assignments, sequenced throughout the semester, to allow for more discussion of writing and revision spread throughout the term. Writing Fellows will no longer sit in on the "fellowed" course, but instead attend a weekly seminar in writing pedagogy, run by Dr. Mathieu and the WF Team. The writing fellows will give *written* as well as *oral* feedback in the writing conferences, to allow the student and faculty member to have a record of the meeting. We believes these changes will make ready the Writing Fellows model as a campus-wide program.

The future of the Writing Fellows Program beyond the 2005-6 academic year is uncertain. There is great potential to create a fully realized writing program that could work with students throughout the university and serve as a model to other institutions. To make this happen, however, core funding, staffing and commitment by BC faculty and administration are essential.

The Need

In a survey of the BC graduating class of 2003, only 41% of students stated that they felt their writing skills had been “greatly enhanced” during their four years at Boston College.¹ The First-Year Writing Seminar, which students typically take in their first semester or may not even take at all because of a high AP test score, is the only core course in which the development of students’ writing is the primary concern. Many BC faculty express a desire to incorporate more attention to writing in their classes but lack the time or resources to work individually with all students; core courses in particular are expected to include a major writing component but often have too many students to make concentrated writing attention a realistic possibility.

Many national groups advocate that writing should become more integral to a college education. In a 2003 report, “The Neglected ‘R’: The Need for a Writing Revolution,” the National Commission on Writing for America’s Families, Schools and Colleges recommends that “Colleges and universities have an obligation to make writing more central to their own programs of study. The teaching of writing at the college level should be infused across the curriculum. Formal courses in the teaching of writing (including English composition) should be the responsibility of well-trained, qualified, professional staff” (27).

College writing can be difficult for students because there is no one uniform set of rules that encompass “good writing.” Disciplines, genres, and individual writing tasks vary in the type of approach, research, style and documentation are necessary. According to the English scholar Wayne Booth, the earmark of a successful writer is an ability to “discover and maintain in any writing situation a proper balance among . . . the available arguments about the subject, the interests and particularities of the audience, and the voice of the speaker” (172). In other words, an adept writer is one who can accurately assess a rhetorical situation and call on a range of writing skills to respond to it; while a novice writer often generalizes rules for “good writing.” For example, student writers may encounter difficulty when they apply what worked well in a reflective essay for a theology course to a sociology research report, yielding less-than-positive results. Rather than understanding that differing rules of genre, evidence and citation are at work, students often feel frustrated and mystified, stating that they didn’t know what their individual teacher “wanted.”

BC’s First-Year Writing Seminar (FWS) offers first-year students intensive practice and one-on-one faculty feedback, helping them develop skills for drafting and revising effective prose. In addition to being a course in which students practice various forms and genres of writing, FWS also helps students understand that each act of writing is a unique rhetorical situation. Rather than advocating a single benchmark for “good writing,” a rhetorical view maintains that what constitutes effective writing in a given situation depends on many factors including audience, purpose, form, and the conventions currently held within the discourse community for which one is writing. FWS is conducted in small workshop settings, and roughly half of the fifty writing faculty are English master’s-level teaching fellows.

Other than significantly lowering class sizes university-wide or adding a host of writing-intensive courses to the undergraduate curriculum, are there ways to encourage BC undergraduates to write more and to write better? Several universities (such as Brown, Tufts, Wisconsin, Colorado State,

¹ Source: BC Department of Enrollment Management. (For internal circulation only.)

etc) have found that a Writing Fellows Program (WF) can efficiently and effectively increase the amount of individual attention students receive on their writing and enhance the quality and visibility of writing throughout the curriculum.

In 2004-2005, with the support of a university Teaching, Advising and Mentoring Grant, a Writing Fellows Pilot was implemented at BC to test the idea that a Writing Fellows Program could enhance the quality and amount of writing and writing instruction within the existing undergraduate curriculum at Boston College.

What is a Writing Fellow?

Simply defined, a Writing Fellows Program is one in which faculty can elect to designate any course as a Writing Fellows class, meaning that it will have trained peer writing fellows attached to it. Working with the fellows becomes an integral and required part of such classes, insuring that students are not writing papers at the last minute, that they are getting quality feedback on their writing, and that faculty can focus on content, confident that writing issues are being addressed before students submit their final papers. Students in the course must submit drafts of required writing in advance to Writing Fellows and individually conference with them concerning organization, structure and readability. The faculty member also engages in dialogue with the WF Program to clarify what constitutes effective writing in each specific disciplinary and rhetorical situation. The Writing Fellows themselves receive training and support in both writing and productively responding to the writing of others.

The BC Pilot Year One

The Writing Fellows Pilot was an initiative based on three working assumptions:

1. That students will become more adept writers if they encounter greater continuity of writing instruction between their First-Year Writing Seminar and their discipline-specific courses. The WF Pilot sought to accomplish this continuity by offering one-on-one conferencing support (similar to the FWS Program) within a discipline-specific course to help students plan, revise and edit in light of the expectations of the given course, assignment and discipline.
2. That conversations among faculty in which they articulate what are often tacit assumptions about what constitutes successful writing in their discipline will benefit both the teaching and learning of writing. The WF Pilot sought to encourage conversations among the cooperating faculty member, the Writing Fellows, and the team running the program.
3. That training advanced students to give writing support and feedback to other students will increase individual learning at BC through an enhanced teaching force. Learning to write is a ongoing and complicated task; and the more writing coaches a student encounters, the better. The WF Pilot enlisted first-year master's students in the English department to act as the first Writing Fellows, which provided two possible benefits. One, schooled in the language and ideas of rhetoric and discourse communities but not in the specific discipline of the core course, these fellows can help students navigate the distance between expert faculty within a field and their own skills as developing writers. Secondly, each year MA English students teach a total of

48 sections of the First-Year Writing Seminar. Giving these graduate students a year's experience as Writing Fellows prior to their second year will help them develop important skills as teachers that will contribute to their teaching of FWS.

The BC Pilot was created by Dr. Paula Mathieu, Director of the First-Year Writing Program in a joint effort of the English Department and The Connors Family Learning Center, with the assistance of a Boston College Teaching, Advising and Mentoring grant.

Prof. Mathieu assembled a Writing Fellows team of her Associate Director and the Assistant Director of the CFLC. Associate Professor Paul Gray, Sociology, volunteered to have WFs attached to his class in Comparative Social Change (SC093), a class of 60 undergraduates. Four Writing Fellows were hired.

The four Writing Fellows (WFs), all graduate students in English and experienced tutors, received initial training in how to conference with students and respond to student papers. The participating faculty member met with the WF team to discuss his expectations for student writing, sharing past examples of A, B, C, etc, papers. The WFs also met with the pilot directors at least once a month to discuss the program and their students' work. They attended the class regularly to become familiar with course content. Each WF was assigned 15 to 20 students with whom they conferenced six times over the course of the semester. Professor Gray included a schedule in his syllabus:

10/11 to 10/15	Introductory Conference
11/1 to 11/5	Conference Midterm Exam
11/8 to 11/11	Annotated Term Paper Proposal
11/15 to 11/19	Term Paper: Draft I
11/29 to 12/3	Term Paper: Draft II
12/13 to 12/17	Conference: Final Exam

Professor Gray also included an explanation of the Writing Fellows Pilot Program and its connection to students' participation grades:

Much like the First-Year Writing Seminar, this course advocates a process approach to writing. Therefore, as you work through each assignment, you will have the benefit of one-on-one conferences with a Writing Fellow—a graduate student possessing both expertise in composition and knowledge of course content. You will be required to attend six, fifteen-minute conferences with your Writing Fellow throughout the semester: once at the beginning of the semester, once prior to each exam due date and three times during the evolution of your term paper. Drafts of each assignment will be due at your scheduled conference time. Participation in these conferences, which will comprise 10% of your final grade, will be instrumental in helping you to meet the standards for writing in this course. Writing Fellows will be assigned after the class roster has been finalized.

Assessment of Year-One Pilot

Three goals were achieved during the Year-One Pilot:

1. **Successfully tested a Writing Fellows component** in one core course to see if and how it enhanced student writing.
2. **Researched existing Writing Fellows Programs** at comparable universities.
3. **Designed plans for a Year-Two Pilot**, which can lead to a fully realized Writing Fellows Program at Boston College.

Assessment of the first-year pilot consisted of a review of all the grades for the course, a survey of all the students in the class, and interviews with the professor, the writing fellows and selected students.

More A's and Fewer C's

While it is impossible to make definitive claims about the effect of the Writing Fellows conferences on grade performance,² convincing anecdotal evidence supports the effectiveness of the Writing Fellows. Professor Gray noted that in comparison to his other semesters of teaching the same course, there “were clearly more outstanding papers and fewer mediocre ones.”

Students Who Received A's for Final Grades:

Pilot year: 28%

Last year: 25%

Students Who Received A's on Their Final Term Papers:

Pilot year: 44%

Last year: 29%

Student Who Received C's on Their Final Term Papers:

Pilot year: 11%

Last year: 21%

Moreover, Professor Gray noted that there was a direct correlation between low final grades and less than full participation with the Writing Fellows conferences. Upon examining the breakdown of grades for each student, he explained that in most cases if a student received a low final grade, that student had also received a low participation grade. This correlation could indicate that the student had not benefited from conferences and that the final grade reflected the consequences: lower grades on papers and exams as well as a lower participation grade.

² Too many other variables can't be controlled, such as how well these same students would have performed without the Writing Fellows support.

72% of Students: “Writing Fellows Provided a Useful Resource.”

An anonymous end-of-semester survey³ asked students to answer a series of questions with numbers (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) as well as written responses. The survey provided a general sense of what students thought about the Writing Fellows Program. Of the 53 students who responded to the evaluation form, 72% (43) either agreed or strongly agreed that “The Writing Fellow Program provided a useful resource.” Only six disagreed that the Program was useful, but of these six, four admitted that they had failed to take full advantage of the resource. Students commonly described the WFs with superlatives such as “very knowledgeable,” “genuinely cared,” “very helpful,” and “encouraging.” In the space provided for additional comments, one student wrote, “The program was very useful in helping me prepare my assignments and improving their quality.” Another concluded, “I, overall, really appreciated the program!”

While no one gave a score lower than 2 in response to the helpfulness of the Writing Fellows, several of those who did give low numbers also admitted to arriving to conferences unprepared or to missing them altogether. In response to “How could your Writing Fellow have been a more effective resource for you?”, one student responded, “If I did my work beforehand”; another wrote, “If I put in more effort,” while still another remarked, “If I had had the discipline to write beforehand, or if the meetings were closer to the due date.” Indeed, there seemed to be a direct correlation between low rankings and lack of participation.

Case Studies: Benefits for the Students

After completing IRB training so that they could interact with human research participants and review research data, each Writing Fellow selected two students from the course with which to discuss the program in greater depth. Basing their selection on the list of final grades, they chose one student who had responded positively to the program and received a high final course grade and one student who had not fully utilized the program and who had received a lower final grade. To create a comfortable environment that would generate more candid responses, the Writing Fellows did not interview their own students but rather interviewed each other’s. For each student interviewed, the WFs collected all correspondence that had taken place during the fall semester between themselves and their students so we could assess the student’s overall effort toward working with the WF.⁴ Here are summaries of two interviews:

“Nice to Know What Others Think”: Student A admitted that he did not take advantage of the Program and suggested that there should be more consequences with regard to the final course grade for students who did not fully participate; he then rescinded that suggestion, however, concluding, “I don’t think imposing grades would have made it that much more effective, actually. In the long run, you get what you want from it anyway. You get out what you put in.” This student received a B for his participation grade, B’s or B-’s on his papers and exams, and a B for his final course grade. Despite admitting he didn’t always take advantage of his WF, the student offered

³ See Appendix

⁴ All interviews and notes are archived on a Writing Fellows WebCT site. Contact Dr. Mathieu if you’d like to read fuller transcripts.

positive feedback. He respected his WF and noted that it was “nice to know what other people might think of my writing. If no one tells you what you are doing wrong you’ll keep getting bad grades, and you won’t be learning anything.”

“Helped Direct You through the Assignment”: Student B received A’s across the board, including for her participation in the WF program. She admitted that she came to conferences with a range of preparedness and shared that she benefited more from conferences when prepared. She noted the conferences “helped direct you through the assignment if it was unclear” and that she was “better able to provide what Dr. Gray wanted.” She liked seeing the WFs in class everyday; their presence gave her confidence in the WFs ability to help her in that specific class that she wouldn’t have felt otherwise by taking her papers to a tutor not affiliated with the course. She observed that some of the conferences were too far in advance and thought there “could be a balance between starting early, and not being able to get anything done to bring to an earlier conference.” She also thought the Program would be especially helpful if paired with introductory science courses where “the writing is very different and for students who were not majoring in sciences and hadn’t had lab write-ups or that type of writing before.”

Benefits for the Writing Fellows

This pilot considered both the benefits for WFs in being able to help students in the pilot course and in their own development as teachers. At the end of the pilot, each WF was interviewed individually. They agreed that the pilot helped them form a teaching community. For example, they appreciated having an office where not only could they meet with their students in a professional environment but they could establish camaraderie among the other WFs. Listening to each other’s conferences proved beneficial; they would often seek advice from one another regarding their students. They felt the monthly meetings were helpful and agreed that overall the one-on-one conferences went well, especially if students came prepared. All four WFs felt that the experience provided valuable preparation for the teaching they would be doing the following year at BC in the First-Year Writing Seminar. They learned how to better articulate their suggestions to students and assess and then address higher order concerns to help students more efficiently and effectively, while developing their teaching personas.

Benefits for the Faculty Member

One WF Team member interviewed Dr. Gray to determine the success of the program from a participating faculty member’s point of view. He said that the Program helped the students take the assignments more seriously, and that from the data he gathered he could infer that the WFs had impacted the students in a positive way. He said he would like to see the program expanded and thought that while it was effective to have WFs from the English department, he would like to see the opportunity for WFs from Sociology or other departments in the role. Ultimately, Dr. Gray expressed enthusiasm for the potential of the WF Program to alter the way introductory courses are taught and confirmed his interest in remaining involved in the evaluative process of the Program.

Visiting Other Writing Fellows Programs: Brown and Tufts

During the second semester of the Year-One Pilot, the WF team visited two universities with fully developed Writing Fellows Programs. The first visit was to Tufts, where we spoke with Carmen Rowe, Assistant Director of the Academic Resource Center, where their Writing Fellows Program is housed. The second was to Brown University, where we met with Prof. Rhoda Flaxman, Director of the Rose Family Writing Fellows Program, which was established in 1982.

Brown University

Brown University has a large and well-developed Writing Fellows program that serves 40 to 50 courses per year, reaching more than half the undergraduates at Brown each year (approximately 3,000 students). The 80 Writing Fellows are undergraduates, carefully selected and trained to help other students improve their writing skills. Competition is stiff: over 300 students vie for roughly 35 positions that open up each year and are chosen based on their demonstrated writing ability and interest in helping other students. Chosen after their first, second, or third undergraduate years, Fellows continue to serve the university as peer tutors as long as they are enrolled at Brown.

Once the Writing Fellows are selected, they complete a three-credit seminar, taught by Program Director Professor Rhoda Flaxman, on the theory and practice of teaching writing. After completion of the seminar, Fellows are regularly evaluated and participate in On-Going Training Sessions every semester.

Each Writing Fellow is assigned to 15-20 students in a course whose professor has requested assistance. The program serves from 40-50 courses each year, reaching more than half the undergraduate population at Brown each year (approximately 3,000 students). The program serves all disciplines at all levels, from introductory philosophy lectures to seminars in biomedical ethics.

In a "fellowed" course, students submit a first draft of each paper to the Fellow 2 weeks before it is due to the professor. During the first week, the Fellows comment extensively on the student's writing, noting strengths and weaknesses in argumentation, analysis, organization, clarity and style. The students then have the next week to consider these suggestions, meet with his/her Fellow in a conference, and revise the paper before handing it in to the professor. The students hand in the annotated first draft with the final version, enabling the professor to consider both the process the student went through and the final product.

The annual budget for the Brown Writing Fellows Program is \$200,000, which covers the full-time faculty salary of the program director as well stipends for the 80 Writing Fellows. A full-time administrative assistant services the program as well, but is funded through a separate budget. The location was funded by an endowment from the Rose Family, in whose name the program is now named.

Tufts University

At Tufts, the WFs are primarily undergraduates; they receive a \$500 stipend each semester, paid in monthly installments. Fellows are usually assigned to classes in their discipline, and are recommended by faculty for a WF position. During their first semester as a WF, they attend a one-credit course to teach and support their writing fellows work. In this course, they research rhetorical differences in the disciplines, discuss grammar, style and produce a newsletter at the end of each course with articles based on their research. Texts used in the course include Patricia O’Conner’s *Woe Is I*, Anne Lamott’s *Bird by Bird*, and Diane Hacker’s *A Writer’s Reference*. Fellows also organize and run an Academic Integrity Workshop as part of new student orientation at the beginning of the school year.

Faculty as well as Writing Fellows receive training and support, in the form of a one-day workshop before the semester begins, for which faculty receive a stipend, and meet with Fellows at least twice during the semester. Many faculty members consult with Fellows more regularly. In some cases, when it is difficult to coordinate meeting times, the Fellows will self-select a point person to meet with the faculty member and disseminate important information (i.e. clarification of assignments) to the others. Currently the social sciences and engineering department utilize the WFs the most.

WFs at Tufts meet with their students 2-3 times a semester for up to an hour each time. Larger papers are sequenced, and Fellows are given a minimum of ten days between the assignment and the due date to meet with students. The students meet in an on-campus coffee shop for the most part.

While students evaluate their WFs at the end of the semester and faculty compare writing in WF courses to that in their other course, no formal outcomes assessment has been conducted.

Our WFs and those at Tufts shared similar concerns. The Tufts WFs noted that the “professor needs to set the tone and buy into the program” to give the WFs validity and ensure the success of the Program. They remarked that sometimes professors unintentionally “sabotage” the WFs’ validity by failing to reinforce their importance to students. Finally, they expressed concerns about the way assignments are written; often the professor’s expectations are not clear to even the WFs, making it difficult for them to help students fulfill the assignment.

Feedback and Lessons Learned

Longer Conferences

In addition to their general praise of the Program, many students expressed a desire for longer conferences, more focused on specific assignments. One student noted, “At times that was enough, but for papers, especially the term paper, 15 minutes was too short to go through it all.”

More Faculty Buy-In

All four WFs concluded that they would have liked more opportunity to communicate with Professor Gray and hoped that future instructors would find more ways to integrate the Program into the class and not treat it as a supplement. They felt the role of the WFs should be clearly explained to the students and that the importance of writing should be emphasized in class. Like their students, they too thought it would be good to begin conferencing earlier in the semester.

More Communication

Like the WFs, Dr. Gray desired more communication between the instructor and the Writing Fellows. Because of schedule conflicts, he was unable to attend the WF meetings; however, he would have liked for the WFs to approach him outside of class on a more regular basis, especially to inform him of students who were not taking advantage of the Program. He wished that the WFs had chimed in more frequently when he was discussing assignments and stopped class when they saw opportunities to talk about writing.

More Role Clarification

The WFs remarked being unclear about their role in the class. Dr. Gray expressed that his teaching assistant felt that students often brought content questions to Writing Fellows that should have been directed to the TA.

Visions and Revisions: Refining the Year Two Pilot

Based on our own reflective research of the First-Year Pilot and our exploration of other Writing Fellows Programs, the WF team came away with several ways to integrate the Writing Fellows more seamlessly into courses throughout the core and to foster greater communication among the students, Fellows and instructors--without increasing the cost of the initial pilot. **With renewed funding--thanks to a second award of a Teaching, Advising and Mentoring Grant—we will test our Writing Fellows model in three new courses and plan several modifications to the program, which we believe will not only increase its effectiveness, but most importantly, will not accrue additional costs.**

In short, we will keep costs constant, and use the finite work hours for the Writing Fellows differently, asking them to hold fewer meetings with students, but making each meeting longer and more involved, to focus specifically and in-depth on three writing projects sequenced throughout the semester (we sought out faculty who were amenable to three writing projects sequenced throughout the term, rather than one or two longer papers). Also, instead of asking Writing Fellows to attend the course in which they are fellowing, they will attend a seminar, run by the Writing Fellows Team, to help them learn and refine their skills of reading and responding to student writing. Our hope is we will achieve several program enhancements while keeping costs constant:

- **To encourage more writing and conferencing throughout the semester:**
Rather than one large paper, an optimal scenario for a Writing Fellowed courses is to

have writing sequenced throughout the semester (roughly three papers), with which the WFs have time to offer feedback, which can be used for revision and for future papers. For the Year-Two Pilot, we sought out faculty eager to include three or more writing assignments sequenced throughout the semester, with time built into the schedule for thorough feedback by fellows and revision by the student.

- **To test the value of the Writing Fellows Program beyond Sociology:** The Year Two Pilot will test Writing Fellows in three new courses in three different disciplines: History, Political Science and Geology. Crystal Feimster in History and Jenny Purnell in Political Science will receive Writing Fellows in the Fall, and Noah Snyder in Geology and Geophysics will partner with us in the Fall. Information gathered in these three courses will test the value of Writing Fellows in a range of humanities, social science and science courses.
- **To clarify the roles and better prepare Writing Fellows:** In Year Two, the WFs will no longer sit in on the course in which they're following, but rather attend a weekly seminar in the theory and practice of responding to writing run by the WF Team. This seminar will allow WFs—who will be teaching the First-Year Writing Seminar the following year—to develop their writing as well as teaching skills and discuss the rhetorical expectations and features of writing within the specific discipline and course. This change will also help further clarify the roles between the faculty member and any Teaching Assistants (who set expectations and offer guidance on course content) and Writing Fellows (who respond to students' drafts and help point out assignments' expectations and areas for revision and improvement). It will also give greater value to the Writing Fellows, most of whom desire to teach in the future.
- **To facilitate communication among faculty and fellows:** We will frequently invite the cooperating instructor to attend the WF seminar and meet with the WF team, to discuss their assignments, expectations and key features of writing. (We have arranged a seminar time that will not conflict with participating faculty schedules.) We will also assign one Writing Fellow to act as liaison to that instructor, to visit frequently in office hours, ask clarifying questions about writing assignments, and discuss issues or concerns found in all the students' writing.
- **To give more time for focused Writing Responses:** With a focus on three writing assignments, the Writing Fellows will meet for one-hour (rather than 15 minutes) after having read a draft of the students' paper. This longer session will allow the time for focused discussion of global writing issues—whether the paper directly responds to the assignment, issues of genre, organization, evidence, citation—as well as specific aspects of language use and writing style—such as specific language, appropriate use of grammatical person, or level of formality.
- **To make more visible the work of the Writing Fellows:** In the Year-One Pilot, the Writing Fellows met in conference with the students, offered verbal feedback only, and assessed the students' participation through a participation grade, which the instructor figured into the course grade. While the instructor learned which students did and didn't

fully participate in the WF component, little more about the students' writing, their areas of struggle or progress were ascertained. In Year Two, rather than participating in the grading of students, students will submit drafts of the paper to the course instructor, who will hand them off to the liaison WF. When the student meets for a 50-minute WF session, he or she will also receive some written comments from the WF on the draft. When the student hands in the final paper, he or she must also hand in the draft with the WF's comments. These comments will serve several purposes: they will provide a visual memory aid to the student to recall the WF conference while revising the paper; they will provide the faculty member a written documentation of student participation in the WF process; they will provide the faculty member information about the students' writing concerns and the type and quality of feedback given by the WFs—which will help facilitate classroom writing instruction as well as communication between WFs and faculty. Finally, the written comments will be useful in training and evaluating Writing Fellows individually and the Program as a whole.

The Writing Fellows Team strongly feels that these revisions to the Year-Two Pilot of the Boston College Writing Fellows Program will both prove its usefulness and serve as a solid working model for a fully realized Writing Fellows Program. If our research indicates that the Year-Two Pilot was once again beneficial to students, we will seek to cooperate with the university in garnering additional resources for a wider campus initiative, which could utilize a range of graduate and undergraduate students in the capacity of Writing Fellows and could extend across a range of writing-intensive core courses.

Future Visions: Beyond the Year-Two Pilot

The possibilities of a fully realized Writing Fellows Program at Boston College are exciting and broad ranging. The resources at Boston College make it an institution poised to create a Writing Fellows Program that is not only on par with programs like those at Brown and Tufts but distinguishes itself nationally, while serving the needs of Boston College students in immediate and important ways. The future is open, but what follows are a list of the key strengths and opportunities facing the Writing Fellows Program:

Strengths

- A solid two-year research base testing the effectiveness of the Writing Fellows Program.
- The First-Year Writing Program possesses faculty who specialize in writing pedagogy and program design.
- The Connors Family Learning Center already possesses a program for tutor training and a visible location on campus.
- A strong collaborative relationship exists between the First-Year Writing Program and the Connors Family Learning Center
- Faculty from a range of disciplines interested in the initiative as a way to bring more focused writing instruction to their students.
- Writing Fellows offer a way to enhance writing instruction within the existing curriculum.

- Since it would only work with interested faculty, a WF Program would not force any faculty to use its services.
- A large group of potential Writing Fellows, which could include graduate and undergraduate students from across the university, as the program grows and develops.

Weaknesses

- No secured operational funding, beyond the Year-Two Pilot.
- The lack of a director whose primary job is to develop the Writing Fellows initiative.
- The lack of guaranteed space for Fellows to meet with students (the English department has generously granted one office in Carney Hall for the two-year pilot.

Opportunities

- A fully realized Writing Fellows Program has almost limitless potential for growth throughout the BC campus. Depending on how the program develops, Writing Fellows could enhance the teaching and practice of writing throughout the university, from undergraduate to graduate students, utilizing both undergraduate and graduate students as Writing Fellows and the students supported. Brown University uses undergraduate writing fellows to work with undergraduate courses; Georgetown University utilizes a Writing Fellows program in its law school. Boston College could distinguish itself by creating a diverse program, one that utilizes Writing Fellows throughout the university, wherever receptive faculty are found.
- Because of its amazing growth potential and possible visibility on campus, the Writing Fellows Program could be an attractive site for development funding, as it was at Brown University, where a Writing Fellows endowment was given.

Threats

- This program would need institutional support from bottom to top in order to thrive. Faculty should be encouraged to participate but *never required*—because an enthusiastic faculty member open to the initiative is essential. An instructor needs to communicate to students in the course the value and importance of the Writing Fellows.
- Without core funding and staffing, the initiative would never reach its full potential.

The Writing Fellows Team is optimistic and excited about the possibilities going forward and encourages interested BC faculty and administrators to contact us to discuss and help plan the future of a fully realized Writing Fellows Program at Boston College.

Acknowledgments

As in any successful educational initiative, collaboration has been essential to the Writing Fellows Pilot; the collegial relationships forged here have been extremely rewarding. This initiative began from a series of conversations: lunch between Paula Mathieu and Bryan Marinelli, where we first discussed the idea of writing fellows; a meeting of the Core Curriculum Committee, where Paul Gray expressed concerns about his students' writing with Paula Mathieu; and subsequent emails from Arts and Sciences Dean, Joe Quinn, who encouraged Paula to develop the idea further. The collaboration among Paula, Bryan and Staci Shultz was key to getting the pilot off the ground, and the insights and hard work of Staci and Bryan this past year were essential. Dr. Paul Gray was generous with his time and adaptable to this new idea as well as supportive throughout. Nicole Biergiel, Bridget Cooper, Eileen Fenn, and Jon Jurich, our writing fellows, offered their hard work and helped refine this first-year pilot.

Many other hands and minds helped shepherd this small project along, to whom we would like to offer our gratitude. Dean Joe Quinn remains an important booster of this project, and his support is deeply appreciated. This project would not have been possible without the support of a BC Teaching Advising and Mentoring Grant and the Office of the Academic Vice President, who funded this pilot. Mary Crane, Chair of the English department has also been a strong supporter of the initiative, offering advice, encouragement, and an office for the fellows. Thanks also to Dee Speros, from the English department, who made sure the Writing Fellows got paid, and to Jackie Skolnik for helping proofread and distribute the report. Sue Barrett, Director of the Connors Family Learning Center, has supported the project from its outset; and since Bryan has left BC to run academic services at Providence College, she has joined the WF Team. It is a true pleasure and privilege to be working closely with her. We also owe a debt of gratitude to John Carfora and Arnold Shore in the Department of Sponsored Programs, who have met with us on several occasions to discuss the planning, fundraising and reporting of this project—offering their sage advice with a great sense of humor. We'd also like to welcome Dianne Hotten-Somers who will take Staci Shultz's place on the WF Team, as Staci leaves to pursue doctoral studies in writing at Michigan. Welcome also to our Year-Two Writing Fellows: Christopher DiBiase, Kristin Imre, and Alicia Pilar Perez.

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.

Appendix

Writing Fellows Evaluation Fall 2004

Please complete the following evaluation of the Writing Fellows Program. Your comments will assist us in measuring the success of the program and identifying areas for revision and improvement in the future. Thank you in advance.

Name of your Writing Fellow: _____

Please evaluate the program by filling in the appropriate number for each item, based on the scale below. Additional comments are welcomed in the space provided.

1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = neutral 4 = agree 5 = strongly agree

Writing Conferences

Fifteen minutes was a sufficient length of time for each individual conference: ☐
Comments: _____

The frequency of writing conferences provided enough assistance: ☐
Comments: _____

The conference deadlines improved your finished work: ☐
Comments: _____

I came to conferences prepared and with the requested work completed: ☐
Comments: _____

The Writing Fellows Program in relation to the course

The Writing Fellow program provided a useful resource: ☐
Comments: _____

The Writing Fellows Program was an integrated component of the course: ☐
Comments: _____

I took full advantage of the resource of the Writing Fellows Program: ☐
Comments: _____

Your Writing Fellow

The Writing Fellow was helpful as a resource for my writing questions:

☐

Comments: _____

The Writing Fellow was available to answer questions and concerns:

☐

Comments: _____

The purpose of the Writing Fellow was clear:

☐

Comments: _____

The Writing Fellow provided clear feedback:

☐

Comments: _____

I communicated my needs to the Writing Fellow and worked with them
towards the goal of improving my writing:

☐

Comments: _____

Other comments (please answer in the space provided):

What would have made the Writing Fellows Program more effective for you?

How could your Writing Fellow have been a more effective resource for you?

What changes would make the program more effective in the future?

Other thoughts?

Thank you and have a terrific Winter Break!!!