



BOSTON COLLEGE

# Writing Fellows Program



## Year-Four Progress Report 2007-2008

Prepared by

**Dr. Paula Mathieu, English Department, Director, Writing Fellows Program**  
**Dr. Suzanne Barrett, Director, The Connors Family Learning Center**  
**Marla De Rosa, Associate Director, Writing Fellows Program**  
**Jenna Collins & Diana Gravelin, 2007-2008 Writing Fellows**

*This initiative was supported by a Boston College Teaching, Advising and Mentoring Grant (2004-2005) and by the College of Arts and Sciences.*

# Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
The Need .....	4
What is a Writing Fellows Program? .....	5
History of Writing Fellows at Boston College.....	5
We designed the Writing Fellows Program to Achieve Three Objectives: .....	5
2007-8 Report on the Writing Fellows Program .....	6
The Partnerships .....	6
Each of the Three Objectives Met.....	8
1. Students Have Become More Confident and Accomplished Writers .....	8
2. Faculty Benefited from their Writing Fellows Partnerships .....	9
3. Writing Fellows Gained Valuable Pedagogical Experience and Insight .....	10
4. Additional Benefits .....	13
Conclusion: 2008-9 and Beyond .....	14
About the Report's Authors .....	15
Acknowledgments .....	15
Appendix A: .....	16
Fully Realized Writing Fellows Programs .....	16
Brown University .....	16
Tufts University.....	17

## Executive Summary

Since 2004, Dr. Paula Mathieu (English), in cooperation with Dr. Suzanne Barrett and The Connors Family Learning Center, has directed a pilot Writing Fellows Program at Boston College to create an initiative for enhancing the effectiveness of writing instruction in undergraduate courses. The program has paired trained graduate-student Writing Fellows with faculty members who want to focus more attention on student writing in a course. Three to four times during the semester, fellows meet individually with students to offer feedback on paper drafts. The Writing Fellows receive training in responding to student writing and in the rhetorical expectations of the specific discipline, and they meet with instructors to fully understand expectations for the writing assignments. For three years, the Writing Fellows pilot tested whether a Writing Fellows Program could enhance the quality of writing and writing instruction at Boston College. The pilot demonstrated the feasibility and value of the program, and during 2007-2008 the program moved beyond the pilot stage and was able to expand its reach to 325 Boston College undergraduates.

**2004-2005 and 2005-2006:** Years one and two of the Writing Fellows' pilot were supported by a Boston College Teaching, Advising and Mentoring Grant (TAM). The program partnered with instructors in Sociology History, Political Science, and Geology. All participating faculty commented on the higher level of writing in their courses overall, particularly from students who seriously committed themselves to the process. Two also noted that they found the program helped their own design of assignments. Of students, 80% found the program a useful resource.

**2006-2007:** With \$15,000 in funding from the College of Arts and Sciences, Writing Fellows sought to increase the diversity of courses with which it had worked as well as to create continuity by extending partnerships with faculty beyond one semester. In the fall, Writing Fellows worked with two courses, Introduction to World Music and Perspectives on Western Culture. In the spring, the program continued with the yearlong Perspectives course and cooperated for a second year in a row with the Rivers and the Environment course. In total, the program worked with 130 undergraduates. The feedback from student evaluations showed that an overwhelming majority of students (92%) saw the value of the program in improving their writing skills, and nearly as many (86%) would take another Writing Fellows course or recommend one to a friend.

**2007-2008:** An increase in funding to \$25,000 from the Office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences enabled the program to increase its number of Writing Fellows to ten, significantly expanding its reach to work with a total of 280 students. In the fall, the program partnered with Dr. Juliet Schor's Shop til You Drop, a core class of 180 students. In the spring, the program partnered with three classes: Prof. Marla De Rosa's Literature & Society, Prof. Jennie Purnell's Fundamental Concepts of Politics II and Prof. Kerry Cronin's Perspectives on Western Culture, working with close to 100 students. **Feedback from student evaluations showed that a significant number of students see the benefits of working with the program: 90% of the students from the fall and 99% of the students from the spring partnerships agreed or strongly agreed that conferencing with the Fellows improved their finished work.**

In the summer of 2008, the program also began an important partnership with the Office of AHANA Student Programs (OASP), pairing five Writing Fellows with the 45 incoming freshman who attended OASP's Options Through Education (OTE) program this summer. The partnership was highly successful, so much so that OASP has indicated that it plans to make the Writing Fellows partnership a permanent component of its OTE program.

## 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. In 2007, only 36.1% said that their writing was “much stronger” than when they entered college.<sup>1</sup> The First-Year Writing Seminar, which students typically take in their first semester—or may not even take at all because of high AP test scores—is the only core course in which the development of students’ writing is the primary concern. Many among the BC faculty express a desire to incorporate more attention to writing in their classes but, especially in the core, large classes limit one’s ability to work individually with all students.

Many national groups advocate that writing should become more integral to a college education. In “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” (27).

College writing can be difficult for students because there is no one set of rules that encompass “good writing.” Disciplines, genres, and individual writing tasks vary in the type of approach, research, style and documentation 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; a novice writer, on the other hand, often generalizes rules for “good writing.” Student writers may encounter difficulty, for example, if they apply techniques that worked well in a reflective theology essay to a geology research report, earning less-than-positive results. Rather than understanding that differing rules of genre, evidence and citation are at work, students may feel frustrated, 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 to help them develop skills for drafting and revising effective prose. FWS also helps students understand that each act of writing is a unique rhetorical situation. Beyond FWS, discipline-specific writing instruction is currently not visible in the BC curriculum. The University Core purports to offer writing-intensive courses, but large class sizes inhibit close attention to student writing.

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, and Colorado State, etc.) have found that a Writing Fellows Program can efficiently and effectively enhance the quality and visibility of writing throughout the curriculum.

Since 2004, a Writing Fellows Pilot has been testing whether a Writing Fellows Program could enhance the quality of writing and writing instruction at Boston College.

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: BC Department of Enrollment Management. (For internal circulation only.)

# What is a Writing Fellows Program?

Simply defined, a Writing Fellows Program is one in which faculty can apply to have a course designated a Writing Fellows class, meaning that it will have trained peer Writing Fellows<sup>2</sup> attached to it. Working with the fellows becomes an integral and required part of such classes, ensuring that students are not writing papers at the last minute and that they are getting quality feedback on their writing. Students in the course must submit drafts of required writing to the Writing Fellows and have individual conferences with them to revise their papers. 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.

Our approach to a Writing Fellows program owes much to the distinction Anne Beaufort makes in *Writing in the Real World: Making the Transition from School to Work*.<sup>3</sup> Beaufort claims that writers need five kinds of knowledge to succeed as workplace writers: discourse-community knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, genre knowledge, process knowledge and subject-matter knowledge. Through training by the WF Program directors and dialogue with the course faculty member, the fellows learn the discourse-community, rhetorical, and genre expectations. Through discussions with the students they reinforce and help teach process skills of revision. And while the fellows do not become experts in the course content, they are in a position to pick up on students' confusion and direct students to the faculty for further explanation.

## History of Writing Fellows at Boston College

The idea for the BC Writing Fellows Program began at a meeting of the BC Core Curriculum Committee in 2003 when Prof. Paula Mathieu (English) attended the meeting to discuss the aims and structure of the First-Year Writing Program—the only required writing course at BC—which she directed. Prof. Paul Gray (Sociology) asked how he might better teach writing in a core sociology course of 60 students. Prof. Mathieu briefly described the Writing Fellows concept as one used at other universities that might work here. Dean Joseph Quinn followed up that meeting by encouraging Mathieu to apply for a Teaching, Advising and Mentoring (TAM) Grant to develop a pilot for such a program. The first three years of the program demonstrated the value of the program and during the fourth year the program endeavored to expand its reach.

### We designed the Writing Fellows Program to Achieve Three Objectives:

1. **That students will become more adept writers** if they encounter greater continuity between their First-Year Writing Seminar and discipline-specific core courses. One way to accomplish this continuity is to offer one-on-one conferencing support within undergraduate courses to help students plan, revise, and edit in light of the expectations of the given course and discipline.

---

<sup>2</sup> Currently, all Writing Fellows are graduate students. While other programs around the country do use some undergraduate tutors within Writing Fellows programs, we—as well as every cooperating faculty member—feel the presence of graduate students helps the undergraduates learn and that the experience is very helpful in the formation of graduate students as teachers.

<sup>3</sup> NY: Teachers College Press, 1999.

2. **That a Writing Fellows Program will aid faculty across various disciplines as they seek to teach students** what are often tacit assumptions about what constitutes successful writing in their disciplines.
3. **That the experience of conferencing with undergraduate writers in core courses will help Writing Fellows**—many of whom will be teaching fellows in the FWS Program in their second year—to develop pedagogical skills that will enhance undergraduate learning at BC.

**2004-2005:** The Year One Pilot, supported by a Boston College Teaching, Advising and Mentoring Grant (TAM) partnered with one course: Dr. Paul Gray's Comparative Social Change, a core Sociology course with 60 students. Four Writing Fellows, incoming English MA students, went through training in reading and responding to student writing, and met three times with students during the semester to offer feedback on drafts of papers. In the second semester, the Directors and Writing Fellows researched large, fully realized Writing Fellows Programs at nearby universities such as Brown and Tufts. Research into the effectiveness of the Year-One Pilot was 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 responded that the program provided a useful resource.<sup>4</sup>

**2005-2006:** Working from a second year of TAM funding, the Writing Fellows Program tested its pilot in three new disciplines: History, Political Science and Geology. (The TAM committee requested a focus on testing out various disciplines for the program). All participating faculty commented on the higher level of writing in their courses overall, particularly from students who seriously committed themselves to the process. Two also noted that they found the program helped their own design of assignments. Of students, 80% found the program a useful resource.

**2006-2007:** In its third and final year as a pilot, with funding from the College of Arts and Sciences, sought to increase the diversity of courses with which the program had worked as well as to create continuity by extending partnerships with faculty beyond one semester. In the fall, Writing Fellows worked with two courses: Dr. Ann Spinney's Introduction to World Music and Prof. Kerry Cronin's Perspectives on Western Culture. In the spring, the program continued with Prof. Cronin's yearlong Perspectives course and cooperated for a second year in a row with Dr. Noah Snyder on his course, Rivers and the Environment. The feedback from student evaluations showed that an overwhelming majority of students (92%) saw the value of the program in improving their writing skills, and nearly as many (86%) would take another Writing Fellows course or recommend one to a friend.

## **2007-8 Report on the Writing Fellows Program**

### ***The Partnerships***

The Office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences provided the 2007-2008 academic year funding of \$25,000 and an additional \$5000 was provided for the OTE summer program. The academic year funding allowed the program to increase the number of Writing Fellows so that it could work with a

---

<sup>4</sup> The full reports from Years One, Two, and Three of the Writing Fellows Pilot project are downloadable as pdfs at [www.bc.edu/connors](http://www.bc.edu/connors).

significantly larger class in the fall and work with three classes at once during the spring. Involving more graduate students as Writing Fellows this year also enabled the program to provide the OTE summer program with several experienced Writing Fellows. The Writing Fellows' prior experience was an important factor in the success of this new and important partnership. These partnerships also enabled the program to reach its goal of working with at least 3% of BC undergrads.

**Fall 2007: Dr. Juliet Schor's (SC093) Shop til You Drop,**

In fall 2007 we started a new partnership with Dr. Juliet Schor's (SC093) Shop til You Drop, a social sciences core class of 180 students and four sociology teaching assistants. Juliet Schor, a Professor in the Sociology Department, remarked working with the Writing Fellows was a "great experience" and that she recommends, "giving every student a Writing Fellow to work with on writing for their classes." One of the goals of this partnership was to identify the logistical challenges of growing the program to work with more students and larger classes while maintaining its high level of pedagogical excellence. The partnership with Dr. Schor's class demonstrated the ability of the Fellows to effectively reach a larger number of Boston College undergraduates in a core class and provide them with one-on-one support. However, the large fall course underscored the need to provide technological support so that Writing Fellows could review drafts and provide feedback electronically to students. Without this type of support, it was challenging for the Writing Fellows to obtain the student drafts and provide feedback in an organized manner. In the spring of 2008, the Writing Fellows program was awarded an Academic Technology Innovation Grant (ATIG) to develop such a system.

**Spring 2008: Professor Kerry Cronin's (PL/TH 090-091) Perspectives on Western Culture**

In spring 2008, we extended our partnership Professor Kerry Cronin's (PL/TH 090-091) Perspectives on Western Culture, the second semester of a yearlong course. Kerry Cronin, a faculty member in the Philosophy and Theology departments and director of the Lonergran Center, has taught at Boston College in the Perspectives Program for 13 years. Professor Cronin has partnered with the Writing Fellows for three semesters since the pilot program. Professor Cronin remains enthusiastic about the program, explaining that she notices a "significant difference—for the better—in student writing and critical thinking when the class is paired with the Writing Fellows."

**Spring 2008: Prof. Jennie Purnell's (PO042) Fundamental Concepts of Politics II**

In spring 2008 we formed a new partnership with Prof. Jennie Purnell's (PO042) Fundamental Concepts of Politics II, the second semester of a yearlong course required for the political science major. Jennie Purnell, Associate Professor in the Political Science Department since 1993, believes "the greatest strength of the program is the one-on-one relationship between students and tutors. Most of the fellows that I have worked with really got to know the students and their strengths and weaknesses as writers."

**Spring 2008: Marla De Rosa's (EN082) Literature & Society**

In Spring 2008 we also partnered with Marla De Rosa's (EN082) Literature & Society, a core English class with 35 students. Marla De Rosa teaches both First-Year Writing Seminar and the Literature core classes. From her experience teaching First-Year Writing seminar, she fully appreciates the value of the revision process in developing student writing. She tries to incorporate peer and instructor reviews into her literature assignments, but with twenty more students than FWS, the larger size of the literature classes makes it a challenge to give students the feedback they need. "When I had the opportunity work with the Writing Fellows, I was thrilled because it meant students would get the time and attention they needed to really improve their analytical writing capabilities."

### **Summer 2008: Options Through Education (OTE) Program**

In summer 2008, we formed an important new partnership with the Office of AHANA Student Programs (OASP), pairing five Writing Fellows with the 45 incoming freshman who attended OASP's Options Through Education (OTE) summer transition program. The mission of OTE, an intensive 6-week academic program in which students take 3-credit courses in both Math and English, is to "prepare the transition to Boston College for a select group of diverse students who have demonstrated potential and leadership in spite of challenging educational and financial circumstances."

The four English classes were taught by Treseanne Ainsworth, Erin Wecker, Swati Mehta, and Marla De Rosa. Each of the four English classes was assigned a Writing Fellow, and one Fellow specializing in ELL worked with ELL students in all classes. The Writing Fellows were an especially important component of OTE because as a transitional program, one of OTE's goals is to equip students with the skills necessary to successfully adjust to college work, and writing is fundamental to a liberal arts education. The partnership was highly successful, so much so that OASP has indicated that it plans to make the Writing Fellows partnership a permanent component of its OTE program.

### ***Each of the Three Objectives Met***

Since 2004, when the pilot project for the Writing Fellows Program began, we have collected response data from participating faculty, from the graduate Writing Fellows, and from participating students to assess the effectiveness of the program. Our hypotheses during the pilot phase of our program and now the three major goals of our program—that the program would help students become more adept writers, would help faculty with articulating their expectations for writing, and would help Writing Fellows in their formation as teachers—have been overwhelmingly confirmed by survey and interview data. Even more encouraging, the responses have gotten increasingly positive each year.

## **1. Students Have Become More Confident and Accomplished Writers**

In 2007-2008, students were surveyed anonymously at the end of the semester for their feedback on the Writing Fellows program. **Of the students surveyed in the fall and spring, 90% and 99%, respectively, either agreed or strongly agreed that conferencing with the Fellows improved their finished work.** We have asked that same question every year and seen steady improvement. In the first year the number was 72%, the second year 80%, the third year 92%. In addition, 87% of students in the fall and 99% of the students in the spring responded that they would take another course with a Writing Fellow or recommend one to a friend.

Along with completing the anonymous survey, students in Marla De Rosa's Literature & Society class provided comments to us about their experiences in the program, including the following:

Caitlin Caulfield: "The feedback that I received from my Writing Fellow did not provide me with any "answers" but rather guided my thoughts into a cohesive thesis. I often have so many various ideas that I have difficulty relating them to an overall theme. Talking with the Writing Fellow helped me to not only articulate my thoughts but also to receive feedback about what part of my writing was not clear. I know that many students put off writing papers until the night they are due.



They write it once, and never look at it again. However, by taking the time to edit and rewrite our papers, I believe that the final product was truly representative of our capabilities and knowledge.”

Djerica Lamrousy: “I valued the Writing Fellows very much and the experience was very helpful to me. Being able to have someone read and critique my work with constructive feedback was a major factor in improving my writing and writing style. My Writing Fellow helped me look deeper into my work and go beyond the surface when writing analytical papers. I feel like I can use all the of advice that I gained from my Writing Fellows in future classes and for any subject.”

Solanlli Toncoso Matos: “ Overall I thought the Writing Fellow program was of great help to the students. My Writing Fellow was always pushing me to think further and improve my writing skills. By the end of the class I can say that I feel more confident with my writing style than what I was before. I think the program should continue for years to come.”

### **The students’ views were strongly supported by the faculty partners:**

#### **Writing Fellows “Definitely” Improved Student Writing**

When asked if working with the Writing Fellows improved student writing, Professor Juliet Schor responded “Yes, definitely. The drafts were much more polished and much better written.” Kerry Cronin echoes this sentiment, noting that students are “forced to write multiple drafts” which helps them “organize and convey their ideas” as well as “reflect on the process of writing.” Finally, Jennie Purnell responded that Writing Fellows “definitely” improved student writing; the “papers were better organized, and the arguments were stronger, clearer and more logical.”

#### **Students Learned Research Strategies and Skills**

Jennie Purnell noted an improvement in not only student writing, but an improvement in research skills as well: “This time around, I assigned research papers rather than analyses of assigned readings. This seemed to work better as far as the fellows were concerned since it didn’t involve such close attention to specific arguments in the readings. They really helped the students a lot with research strategies and mechanics (citations, bibliographies, etc.).”

#### **Students are More Confident in their Writing Abilities**

Marla De Rosa noted the awareness that her OTE students gained about their capabilities: “I saw dramatic increases in the student’s writing abilities and their confidence. The dedication and time shown by the Writing Fellows gave students the encouragement and help they needed to really work on and push forward with their writing. This is an invaluable skill that they will need in the academic year, and I feel like they can go into the fall with a high level of experience and confidence. Even if they still have areas that need work, they are aware of those and know how to work on them and get help.”

## **2. Faculty Benefited from their Writing Fellows Partnerships**

#### **Faculty Wrote Better Assignments**

Kerry Cronin claimed her partnership with the Writing Fellows “absolutely improved the way I write assignments...having to present assignments to the fellows made me realize when I was being unclear. It was useful to get feedback from the fellows, who, like freshmen, have the perspective of someone new to the field.” Marla De Rosa also found that feedback from the Writing Fellows

helped refine her assignments. “Before I would finalize an assignment, I would send it to the Writing Fellows for feedback. Their insights and questions helped me eliminate any ambiguity in the assignment before students even saw it.”

### **New Insights and Ideas about the Grading Process**

Marla De Rosa was impressed at how well adept the Writing Fellows were in the process of helping students with their writing. “I could see from the feedback the Writing Fellows provided that they had been trained in how best to coach and guide students. They always started with the strengths of the paper before noting the areas that needed attention. They did not tell students how to fix their papers, but instead asked very insightful questions that helped students realize where their papers needed work. When I received the final papers to grade, I was able to build on this dialogue that the Writing Fellows had started with the students. I was able to present my feedback in this same spirit of guidance and coaching. I always allow and encourage students to revise their papers and this semester, I had many more students actually do that. One student even told me that he realized the value of continually refining his thinking and writing.”

### **Support For Writing Across Different Disciplines**

All faculty members conveyed the importance, often unacknowledged, of writing in their discipline. Writing is “extremely relevant” in Sociology, Juliet Schor remarked. Similarly, Jennie Purnell noted: “I’m in political science and I found the fellows to be very useful. Prior to their meeting with the students, we talked about norms for research and writing in the discipline and they conveyed those quite well to the students.” Kerry Cronin elaborated on the usefulness of the Writing Fellows in the Perspectives Program, which is “interdisciplinary...the fields of Philosophy and Theology coming together.” Professor Cronin also suggested that Writing Fellows would fit well with Boston College’s Honors program, which is similarly interdisciplinary.

While emphasizing the importance of writing in classes other than English undoubtedly helps students, writing across the disciplines is beneficial to professors too. First, instructors are “able to focus more on content,” according to Professor Cronin. For example, teachers would not be forced to deal with organizational or logistical problems in a chemistry lab report or history essay; if paired with Writing Fellows, the teacher would be better able to identify students’ comprehension of disciplinary subject matter. Secondly, as theorists such as Peter Elbow have argued, writing can help students learn better, which can lead to content mastery and richer class discussions.

### **Fellows Provide Intellectual and Personal Mentoring**

Kerry Cronin explained that the Writing Fellows provided Boston College students, especially freshmen, with a unique service: “Freshmen feel like somebody is paying attention. Fellows are more than an abstract center in O’Neill. Someone is actively seeking them out to show them what resources are available. This says Boston College is not going to let students float around...but provide support during the transition to college.” Cronin suggested “identifying classes where the majority of students are freshmen, like core classes and the Perspective Program, and pairing Writing Fellows with every single one.” The fellows’ work with OTE reinforces Professor Cronin’s assessment of the benefits of pairing Writing Fellows with first year students.

## **3. Writing Fellows Gained Valuable Pedagogical Experience and Insight**

Each year, we interview the outgoing Writing Fellows to learn if being part of the program helped prepare them for future pedagogical challenges. Several of this year’s Writing Fellows will be teaching the First-year Writing Seminar this coming year. Since the transition from graduate

student to teacher is often a large and challenging leap for graduate students, this program sees teacher formation as key to its mission.

**Katie Daily**, a Writing Fellow in 2007-2008, was a first year MA student in the English department who was later selected as a Teaching Fellow and will teach two sections of First-year Writing Seminar in the 2008-2009 academic year. Part of Katie's preparation for FWS involved conferencing with students who were at first resistant to working on their writing:

There are students who approach writing as an unnecessary burden, which is difficult to address both in and outside the classroom. I found this particularly true with students interested in the medical sciences, those who viewed writing as a chore and something they would not use in their careers. After learning to approach them with unwavering patience, I found that they were as willing as any other student to engage in the writing process; it was just about learning their language.

Katie's experience as a Writing Fellow has made her feel more assured about not just the conferencing portion of FWS but about classroom instruction as well:

The WF Program allowed me to expand my professional vocabulary by reaching out to a multitude of students outside of my own department. This served as tremendous preparation for teaching FWS as I am now confident going into the classroom as well as conferences.

**Sean Keck**, a Writing Fellow in 2007-2008, as well as for the OTE program this summer, was a first year MA student in the English department and will teach two sections of First-year Writing Seminar in the 2008-2009 academic year. Sean felt that he gained numerous benefits working as a Writing Fellow:

Working one-on-one with undergraduates has both readied me for the conferences I will have with my students as a First-Year Writing Seminar instructor and created a link to the larger BC community, providing me a sense of belonging and purpose outside my own graduate course of study. The latter has proven especially true with regard to the Options Through Education pairing with Writing Fellows. There we became, in many cases, more than writing resources, but also mentors the students could turn to for help throughout their freshman year.

**Diana Gravelin**, a Writing Fellow in 2007-2008, as well as for the OTE program this summer, was a first year MA student in the English department and will teach two sections of First-Year Writing Seminar in the 2008-2009 academic year. Diana felt that her work with faculty members helped in her own preparation for teaching in 2008-2009:

Working closely with the teachers of the courses we partnered with was such good experience for teaching the First-Year Writing Seminar. Meeting with the teachers to discuss the writing assignments and their expectations for the papers was the first time I had ever stopped to consider the possibility that it might not be easy to write an assignment that would elicit the kind of writing I wanted. I now know how helpful it will be to ask my peers and FWS mentor to review my draft assignments and for me to go over these assignments with my students in detail. Writing Fellows provided me with many opportunities like this, with chances to see things from "the other side of the desk," and as a student preparing to be a teacher, that was extremely helpful.

**Jenna Collins** a Writing Fellow in 2007-2008, as well as for the OTE program this summer, was a first year MA student in the English department and will teach two sections of First-Year Writing Seminar in the 2008-2009 academic year. Jenna also noted the value of working with the instructors:

One of the many highlights was working closely with an experienced teacher. This component of the program was beneficial because it provided the opportunity to speak candidly with professors from various disciplines about the everyday components of teaching that English graduate students may not think about, such as the importance of being clear in your grading criteria. Furthermore, the practical experience of being in the classroom and even teaching a class, as I did this summer in OTE, is nicely complemented by the pedagogical questions I found myself asking. For example, the teacher whose class I worked with this summer took the time to talk with me about aspects of the First-Year Writing classroom from the benefits of teaching grammar to the importance of learning to write well in a liberal arts education. Perhaps most importantly, my experience as a Writing Fellow has introduced me to a community of colleagues and mentors who continually inspire with their examples and encourage me with their words.

**Niall Twohig**, a Writing Fellow in 2006-2007, and an FWS instructor in 2007-2008 as well as one for 2008-2009, Niall returned to the Writing Fellows program this summer for its work with OTE. Niall got to know students who were working hard to adjust to the academic rigor of Boston College:

Some of the most powerful moments for my students came when they were pushed to their limits. As an example: two of my students, who had been at the top of their high school classes, began to get substantially lower grades than they were accustomed to getting in their high schools. In an intensive program like OTE, it is hard to take in, and learn from, these unpredicted shortcomings when the next challenge is already upon you. Yet, these students never wavered. They sought out my help in the hopes that they could learn what gaps separated their knowledge from the knowledge that they needed to succeed in the college classroom.

As a Writing Fellow, Niall played a crucial role as support and guide for his students. His work, though, did not just benefit the students; the support and guidance Niall received from OTE helped Niall to grow as a Fellow and FWS instructor:

Working for OTE, I took on a role that built on all my previous work as a Writing Fellow while providing an opportunity to recognize the gaps in my experience as a teacher. In one case, I worked with several non-native speakers. I shared my knowledge with these students, but I quickly realized when my knowledge reached its limit. Just as students encountered gaps in their knowledge this summer, I began to recognize the gaps in my own experience. Just as my students sought out assistance with their challenges, I sought help. OTE provided a familial network of talented faculty, staff, and counselors who helped me with this and other issues.

## 4. Additional Benefits

### Writing Fellows as Mentors and Advisors

As Professor Kerry Cronin noted above, the Writing Fellows provide support and mentoring to students. This was a common theme from many of the students and instructors. In this regard, the Writing Fellows were an especially important component of OTE. As graduate students in English, fellows are neither strictly peers or professors; rather, fellows fall somewhere in between, and thus acted as role models combining aspects of both peer and professional relationships in their interaction with OTE students. Advisors and peer mentors are a crucial component of new Boston College students' academic success, and the fellows' work with OTE demonstrates the advantages/strengths of BC's Writing Fellows program. Warren Chang, the director of the OTE program, noted this important role:

For my part, the Writing Fellows added a strongly positive element to the program this summer. We never know what will make the difference for our students—sometimes it's their roommate, sometimes it's the counselor or preceptor, and other times it's an instructor. By adding the Writing Fellows this summer, we not only increased the writing and critical thinking abilities for all our students, but, more importantly, we gave them another avenue to connect with Boston College—and I am sure that for some students that made the major difference for them. I am fully confident that our students are better off for having spent the extra time solidifying their skills, setting a higher standard for themselves, and making a connection with another potential resource in the fall.

All of the OTE staff responded enthusiastically to the addition of Writing Fellows. OTE faculty and administrators' completed a survey at the end of the program, in which 100% of respondents strongly agreed "the Writing Fellows added significant value to OTE this summer. Additionally, 100% of staff strongly agreed "OTE should continue to hire Writing Fellows next year."

Trese Ainsworth, one of the OTE English faculty members elaborated on the benefits of adding Writing Fellows to the program:

I cannot adequately express how valuable the Writing Fellows were. The impact on students' writing was dramatic. The additional supportive relationship with another instructor/mentor was also very important. We serve our students so much better with the Writing Fellows as part of the English team. In my humble opinion, their participation was the most significant improvement in the program this year, and should absolutely be continued."

### Another Avenue to Provide Tutoring Help to Students

Writing Fellow Sean Keck noted that the Writing Fellow Program is, for some students, a more effective way to provide help and tutoring in writing skills.

It is useful to consider how the Writing Fellows experience differs from traditional, non-class-wide tutoring programs. Both types of support offer one-on-one attention. Because Writing Fellows are paired with specific classes, however, the feedback they give their students can be much more specifically grounded in the expectations and requirements of the class as conveyed by the professor (for the Writing Fellows program is also a partnership between instructor and Fellows). Traditional writing tutoring is limited to those students who actively seek it out. The students who most need help, sometimes unwilling to face the

stigma of being different from their classmates, may never show up in tutoring. The students who seemingly least need help are practically guaranteed to never show up. But there is room for improvement and discovery through writing across the full spectrum of abilities. By working with an entire class, the Writing Fellows program recognizes the growth potential of all students.

## **Conclusion: 2008-9 and Beyond**

In 2007-2008, the Writing Fellow Program received \$25,000 in funding from the Office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences and an additional \$5000 for the OTE program. Through this funding we have met our goal to double the reach of the Writing Fellows Program to work with 3% of BC undergrads while maintaining a high level of pedagogical excellence. While this is a laudable number, established Writing Fellows Programs work with many more undergraduate students. The Brown University program works with 60% of the undergraduate population (see Appendix B) in their designated “writing intensive” classes. This fall alone, Brown is will offer twenty Writing Fellows courses.

Several key lessons and ideas emerged from the program’s work this year:

1. It is possible to support writing across a range of class sizes and academic disciplines. However, as the program scales up it will be necessary and valuable to provide a technological system where materials for instructors, students, and Writing Fellows can be maintained and accessed. The ATIG grant will be critical in supporting development of this system.
2. The Writing Fellows can play an important mentoring and advising role to students. While this was not an explicit goal of the program, this has emerged as an important benefit. For first-year students especially, the Writing Fellows can help students feel more engaged and supported by the university in a key transitional year.

2008-2009: In the coming academic year, the program will continue to expand its reach. For the first time the program will be working with a class in the Carroll School of Management. Writing Fellows will be paired with Dr. Elizabeth Keating’s Managerial Accounting class. This is a wonderful opportunity to support CSOM students as they work to develop strong business writing capabilities. A report from The National Commission on Writing, “Writing: A Ticket to Work or a Ticket Out” notes that “Writing is a ‘threshold skill’ for hiring and promotion among salaried (i.e., professional) employees. Survey results indicate that writing is a ticket to professional opportunity, while poorly written job applications are a figurative kiss of death” (5). We believe the Writing Fellows can help CSOM students understand and master the writing conventions and skills that are part of effective business writing. In addition to the CSOM class, Writing Fellows will also be working with Professor Beverly Tanis’ history core class and Dr. Howard Enoch’s Introduction to Theatre.

Going forward, our goal is to see the Writing Fellows Program continue to grow until it is a fully realized and established program within the university—with a program director, stable budget, and the ability to reach a quarter to half of BC undergraduates annually. We think this program would be an ideal component of a much-needed university Writing Center, which could house not only the Writing Fellows Program but also the Online Writing Center (OWL) and the writing tutoring. In

the fall of 2009, Paula Mathieu will resume her directorship of the First-Year Writing Program within the English Department and will be unable to maintain her teaching load and run both programs simultaneously. In other words, the next few years will be key in deciding the future of the Writing Fellow initiative at Boston College.

## ***About the Report's Authors***

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

Suzanne Barrett is Director of the Connors Family Learning Center. With a doctorate in English literature from Brown University, Dr. Barrett has worked at BC since 1992. In addition to coordinating all the services of the CFLC, she teaches a wide array of undergraduate courses and runs pedagogy and orientation workshops for Teaching Assistants and new faculty.

Marla De Rosa, Associate Director of the Writing Fellows program is an adjunct faculty member in the English Department. In addition to teaching First-Year Writing Seminar and the Literature Core, she has an background in business and technology writing. She has worked with Paula Mathieu as a mentor for new FWS instructors.

Diana Gravelin and Jenna Collins were members of the 2007-2008 Writing Fellows program and are currently instructors in the First-Year Writing Seminar program.

## **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 e-mails 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, Bryan, Sue Barrett and Diane Hotten-Somers have been essential in giving this program life. The faculty with whom we have cooperated—Dr. Paul Gray, Dr. Jennie Purnell, Dr. Noah Snyder, Dr. Crystal Feimster, Dr. Anne Spinney, Kerry Cronin, Dr. Juliet Schor, Trese Ainsworth, Erin Wecker, and Swati Mehta—were generous with their time and adaptable to this new idea as well as supportive throughout. The OTE program directors, Dr. Ines Maturana Sendoya and Warren Chang, made possible the smooth integration of the Writing Fellows into the summer program. Our four years of Writing Fellows offered their hard work, enthusiasm, and vital feedback, which helped refine this pilot.

Many other hands and minds helped shepherd this small project along, to whom we would like to offer our gratitude. This project would not have been possible without the support of two BC Teaching Advising and Mentoring Grants and the Offices of the Academic Vice President and of

the Provost, especially Dr. Donald Hafner. The Arts and Sciences Deans Office have shown unwavering support and continued funding for the program. 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. Diane Hotten-Somers, who worked as Associate Director of the program in 2005 and 2006, contributed valuable insights from her experience as an FWS teacher and a tutor. We are grateful to the Department of Sponsored Programs, who have met with us on several occasions to discuss the planning, fundraising and reporting of this project. 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 A:**

### ***Fully Realized Writing Fellows Programs***

The Writing Across the Curriculum Clearinghouse<sup>5</sup> lists 28 university or college Writing Fellows programs. Brown University and Tufts University are two schools with fully developed programs.

#### ***Brown University***

Brown University has a large and well-developed Writing Fellows program that serves 40 to 50 courses per year, reaching 60% of 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 Douglas Brown, 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 all disciplines at all levels, from introductory philosophy lectures to seminars in biomedical ethics. This fall alone, Brown is will offer 20 Writing Fellows courses.

In a "fellowed" course, students submit a first draft of each paper to the fellow two weeks before it is due to the professor. During the first week, the fellows comment extensively on the students' writing, noting strengths and weaknesses in argumentation, analysis, organization, clarity and style. The students then have the next week to consider these suggestions, conference with their fellows, and revise the papers before handing them 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

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://wac.colostate.edu/fellows/>



location was funded by an endowment from the Rose Family, for whom the program is now named.<sup>6</sup>

### **Tufts University**

At Tufts, the Writing Fellows 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 Writing Fellows position. During their first semester as a Writing Fellow, 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 departments utilize the Writing Fellows the most.

Writing Fellows 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 Writing Fellows at the end of the semester and faculty compare writing in Writing Fellow courses to that in their other course, no formal outcomes assessment has been conducted.

Our Writing Fellows and those at Tufts shared similar concerns. The Tufts Writing Fellows noted that the “professor needs to set the tone and buy into the program” to give the Writing Fellows validity and ensure the success of the program. They remarked that sometimes professors unintentionally “sabotage” the Writing Fellows’ 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 Writing Fellows, making it difficult for them to help students fulfill the assignment.

---

<sup>6</sup> See [http://www.brown.edu/Student\\_Services/Writing\\_Fellows/](http://www.brown.edu/Student_Services/Writing_Fellows/) for additional information.