

SoTL Grant Application Form

(2014-2015)

Please note that your research proposal should align with the following definition of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, SoTL, endorsed by the University Faculty Council in January of 2014:

"The rigorous investigation of student learning, with the purpose of developing novel teaching methodologies and practices that can lead to the measurable enhancement of student learning. The results of the investigation are made public through quality scholarly outlets and widely-accepted conferences and general or discipline-specific journals."

Proposals are due to the Office for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment by **Monday, September 22nd, 2014** and should be [submitted online](#). Award recipients will be notified by October 6th, 2014. Funded recipients will need to submit a final report for the grant project to TLA by September 1st, 2015.

I. Basic Information

Title of Project: **Writing Fellows Assessment Project**

Investigator(s) Information

Principal Investigator:

Name: Amanda Gaddam
 College: College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences and School for New Learning
 Department: University Center for Writing-based Learning, Department of Writing, Rhetoric, & Discourse, and SNL Writing
 Phone Number: 773-325-2919
 Email Address: agaddam2@depaul.edu

Other Investigators (Co-Pi):

Name	College	Department
Kelly Tzoumis	College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences	Public Policy Studies
Matthew Pearson	--	University Center for Writing-based Learning (UCWbL)

For each investigator, please include an abbreviated CV using the SoTL grant CV template.

Will your project involve human subjects? Yes No

If Yes, you will be required to provide evidence of IRB approval or exemption before any granted funding can be made available to you.

Requested Funds

Amount Requested (up to \$2,500): \$2,500

II. Project Abstract (250 words or less)

This project focuses on how Writing Fellows, course-based peer writing tutors, help students learn to evaluate and apply feedback in written assignments for undergraduate courses. Our research inquiry is two-fold: we intend to investigate whether or not Writing Fellows help students produce higher quality papers than they would on their own, and we seek to identify the specific writing issues that Writing Fellows help students address. Scholars in the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and writing center disciplines have long called for more quantitative assessment, and our proposed project answers this call by providing significant sample of papers to analyze and specific, nationally tested criteria for assessment in the form of a rubric published by the National Writing Project, which has evidence of both validity and high inter-rater reliability (Swain & LeMahieu, 2012). This research is expected to be a significant contribution to understanding the impact of course-based peer writing tutors on students' writing process and providing instructors and administrators with reliable, empirical evidence in support of building Writing Fellows into courses.

III. Project Description (1000 words or less)

Purpose of Project

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to fill a gap of knowledge and application in the existing writing center and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) scholarship by providing a quantitative analysis of Writing Fellows' impact on students' written work in undergraduate courses. We plan to investigate the effects of working with Writing Fellows in students' final papers. In addition, we will investigate specifically which writing elements and textual issues Writing Fellows have the largest impact on.

Research Question: Multiple research questions are investigated. The first part of investigation tests: *To what extent does working with Writing Fellows help students create more effective writing projects than students who do not work with Writing Fellows?* This approach provides the opportunity to quantify the improvement that students who work with Writing Fellows experience for individual assignments.

The second part of the research question is: *How are the writing projects produced by students working with Writing Fellows improved?* This investigation works toward identification of the specific academic writing issues that Writing Fellows help students address using a rubric from the literature on writing and established by the National Writing Project.

Theoretical Framework

Qualitative assessment of Writing Fellows Programs in university contexts, usually in the form of interviews and surveys, is fairly common in the fields of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) studies, writing center studies, and composition and rhetoric (e.g. Haring-Smith, 1992; Soven, 2001; Zawacki et al., 2008). Scholars have called for more quantitative assessment of WAC initiatives such as Writing Fellows Programs (e.g. Marr & Misser, 2008), but responses to that call have been scarce. Two notable exceptions include Hoyt & Peterson (2011) and Ross Regaignon & Bromley (2011). The former study demonstrates

that working with Writing Fellows help students improve the depth and focus of their writing projects, while the latter indicates that working with Writing Fellows leads to students' improvement in writing over the course of a semester. The results of these studies provide some evidence of Writing Fellows' efficacy, but problems with methodology, including insignificant sample sizes and ill-defined assessment criteria, raise serious questions about potential applications for their conclusions.

While these projects paved the way for quantitative assessment of Writing Fellows, our proposed project fills the need for large-sample, rigorous assessment that utilizes specific, independently vetted criteria for assessment and empirically driven statistical analysis.

Research Methodology

Sample design

Two sets of final papers from four course pairs, or eight classes total, were collected for analysis. All courses were taught by the same professor who standardized the assignments and lectures, which allows for the minimization of internal validity problems impacting student performance associated with potentially different assignments or lecture content. One class in each pair worked with Writing Fellows and the other class, marked "Control," did not. (See Table 1) From this sample, two types of analysis can be performed: 1) the evaluation of Writing Fellows' effectiveness in producing higher quality final papers and 2) the evaluation of the types of writing issues that Writing Fellows help students improve.

Table 1.

Course	Term	Writing Fellows (WF)	Control	n=students
LSP 112	Winter 2015	WF		n=est. 20
LSP 112	Winter 2014		Control	n=17
PPS 206	Winter 2015		Control	n=est. 16
PPS 206	Winter 2014	WF		n=16
PPS 206	Winter 2013	WF		n=15
PPS 204*	Spring 2007		Control	n=27
PPS 202	Spring 2014		Control	n=18
PPS 202	Spring 2013	WF		n=18
Total				est. 147

**PPS 204 and PPS 206 are the same course with the same instructor and assignments.*

Other Control Variables

Other factors were included in the analysis are control variables for external influences that may impact student performance outside of the Writing Fellow experience. For instance, control variables such as major and rank in school were evaluated. The selected courses reflect students in different majors and rank in school which impacts writing experience and ability.

Analysis

Part One: Using a widely accepted rubric published by the National Writing Project, the *Analytic Writing Continuum* (Appendix B), coders trained with double-blind techniques for inter-coder reliability evaluate each draft in paired courses in six categories: Content, Structure, Stance, Sentence Fluency, Diction, and Conventions. Scores from classes with Writing Fellows are compared to scores from classes without Writing Fellows to determine which category Writing Fellows had the greatest impact on.

Part Two: The same rubric will be used by coders to produce a single score per essay, so that student performance on papers in courses with Writing Fellows can be compared to student performance on papers in associated courses without Writing Fellows to measure the impact on overall paper quality.

Comparisons in both parts of the analysis can be directly made because the assignments, requirements, and instructor did not change across control and Writing Fellows courses.

Statistical Tests

A Chi-Square test will be used to test for independence of the variables of the controls and other variables such as overall class performance as well as individual grade improvement. This statistical test, along with cross-tabulations with statistics like Kendall’s Tau and Gamma, will be used to evaluate strength and direction of the impact of student performance.

Impact of Project

For instructors at DePaul, this project will demonstrate how allowing time for revision and providing resources like the Writing Fellows Program can enhance students’ learning by helping them to evaluate and apply feedback about their writing and to make their tacit knowledge explicit in written assignments, in accordance with the UCWbL’s Learning Outcomes. Additionally, this project may provide the data that writing programs and writing centers in other university contexts need to support the start up and funding requests for a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) initiative.

Dissemination of Results

We plan to apply to present our preliminary findings from the first round of analysis at the Teaching & Learning Conference at DePaul University on May 2, 2014 and the results of our completed analysis at the 2015 Council of Writing Program Administrators Conference in Boise, ID from July 12-July 19, 2015. We also intend to submit the write-up of our completed project to a peer-reviewed publication in the field of Writing Across the Curriculum or writing center studies (e.g. *Praxis, The WAC Journal, The Writing Center Journal*) by the end of Summer Quarter 2015.

IV. Project Plan and Timeline

Autumn Quarter 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train and norm student research assistants as coders from the University Center for Writing-based Learning
December Intersession 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform coding and analysis for PPS 202 papers
Winter Quarter 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct Winter 2015 PPS 206 without Writing Fellows and LSP 112 with Writing Fellows

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare a presentation proposal of preliminary findings for Teaching & Learning Conference at DePaul University in Spring Quarter 2015
Spring Quarter 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perform coding and analysis for PPS 206 and LSP 112 drafts Present at Teaching & Learning Conference at DePaul University on May 2, 2014
Summer Quarter 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write up the results of the study and prepare to submit to peer-reviewed publications Submit study to a peer-reviewed publication in the field of writing center studies
Autumn Quarter 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise write-up as required by publishing outlet

V. Budget

Existing financial support

The University Center for Writing-based Learning (UCWbL) employs Amanda Gaddam as Research Coordinator and a number of student employees that are chosen through a competitive process to work on the UCWbL Research Team (the number of student employees vary each quarter). During Autumn Quarter 2014, four student employees are paid by the University Center for Writing-based Learning to work on the Research Team for five hours per week, which is representative of the average number of team members and hours spent per quarter.

We estimate that UCWbL Research Coordinator Amanda Gaddam will spend an average of five hours (out of fifteen total hours on the UCWbL Research Team) each week working on the Writing Fellows Assessment Project during Autumn Quarter 2014, December Intersession 2014, Winter Quarter 2015, Spring Quarter 2015, and Summer Quarter 2015. The pay rate for this position is \$16.00/hour.

Student employees who work on the UCWbL Research Team will serve as coders for the Writing Fellows Assessment Project. We estimate that two of the five hours that each student employee has to work on the UCWbL Research Team will be spent working on the Writing Fellows Assessment Project during Autumn Quarter 2014, Winter Quarter 2015, and Spring Quarter 2015. The average pay for a student employee on the UCWbL Research Team is \$11.00/hour.

Estimated financial Support from the University Center for Writing-based Learning breaks down as follows:

	Per Hour	Per Week	Per Quarter	Total
Research Coordinator	\$16.00	\$80.00	\$800.00	\$3,440.00
Research Team Member	\$11.00	\$22.00	\$220.00	\$660.00
Research Team Member	\$11.00	\$22.00	\$220.00	\$660.00
Research Team Member	\$11.00	\$22.00	\$220.00	\$660.00
Research Team Member	\$11.00	\$22.00	\$220.00	\$660.00
			Grand Total	\$6,080.00

Proposed use of SoTL funds

1. We seek funding to hire four UCWbL Research Team members as student research assistants for December Intersession 2014 to work with UCWbL Research Coordinator Amanda Gaddam to perform coding and analysis on the PPS 202 papers and create an extended review of relevant scholarship for fifteen hours per week. The UCWbL is open during December Intersession for three weeks. The proposed breakdown of funds is as follows:

	Per Hour	Per Week	Total
Research Team Member	\$11.00	\$165.00	\$495.00
Research Team Member	\$11.00	\$165.00	\$495.00
Research Team Member	\$11.00	\$165.00	\$495.00
Research Team Member	\$11.00	\$165.00	\$495.00
		Total	\$1,980

2. The remainder of the SoTL funds, approximately \$520.00, will be used to defray the costs of registration at the 2015 Council of Writing Program Administrators Conference in Boise, ID for the three principal investigators. Based on the 2014 CWPA Conference, registration fees will be an estimated \$275.00 per person. The remaining SoTL funds will pay for approximately 63% of each co-PI's registration.

Appendix A. Bibliography

- Anson, C., & Lyles, K. (2011). The Intradisciplinary Influence of Composition and WAC, Part Two: 1986-2006. *The WAC Journal*, 22, 7-20.
- Haring-Smith, Tori. "Changing Students' Attitudes." *Writing Across the Curriculum: A Guide to Developing*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, Inc. (1992): 123-31.
- Hoyt, C., & Peterson, M. (2010). Toward a More Perfect Union: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Data in Writing Fellows Program Assessment. *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, 8(1).
- Marr, B., & Misser, E. (2008). Writing Tutors in the Economics Classroom: A Case Study. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 38(3), 21-36.
- Rossmann Regaignon, D., & Bromley, P. (2011). What Difference Do Writing Fellows Programs Make? *The WAC Journal*, 22, 41-63.
- Soven, M. (2001). Curriculum-based peer tutors and WAC. *WAC for the New Millennium: Strategies for Continuing Writing Across-the-Curriculum Programs*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.
- Swain, S. & LeMahieu, P. (2012). Assessment in a culture of inquiry: The story of National Writing Project's Analytic Writing Continuum. In N. Eliot and L. Perelman (Eds). *Writing assessment in the 21st Century: Essays in honor of Edward White*. New York: Hampton Press.
- Zawacki, T. M., Antram, A., Price, A., Ray, K., & Koucheravy, T. (2008). Writing Fellows as WAC Change Agents: Changing What? Changing Whom? Changing How?. *Across the Disciplines*, 5.