



Effective Approaches to Facilitating Sustainable Faculty Writing Groups

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Objectives of this presentation

- Describe how successful models for faculty writing evolved at ASU (general) and Texas A & M (mission focused)
- Share experiences of obstacles faced and solutions devised
- Offer a list of tips and logistical suggestions to help faculty implement writing groups
- Solicit audience ideas about implementing their own faculty writing groups



What faculty writing groups can do

- Provide a structure to motivate faculty
- Expand awareness of the research of others in your own department or of others in your college or university if the group is inter-professional or transdisciplinary
- Encourage social support – meet potential collaborators, help faculty develop strategies for useful and positive critiquing



Common obstacles to sustaining groups

- Competition for faculty time
- Reluctance to share drafts, especially among junior faculty
- Having a format that is not conducive to ongoing writing or that is burdensome to maintain at crunch times (e.g., when grades are due)
- Not having a facilitator or someone responsible for logistics



CONHI, Iteration 1, ~2003

- Faculty requested writing support – general need
- Emailed invitation to all faculty; 6-8 joined
- *Format*: Biweekly meetings, full draft, one per meeting
- *Results*: Attendance tailed off; tried to resuscitate next semester or two, with similar results
- *Lesson*: Submitting and reading full drafts: not practical

PS At this time a faculty who specialized in faculty development (Dr. Debra Hagler) was doing parallel sessions on different campuses



CONHI, Iteration 2: ~2009

- Began collaborating with Debbie for a more effective format
- Contacted ASU Writing Center: a pilot using a train-the-trainer model
- *Format*: One facilitator for each of 4 small groups; 2-hour training for facilitators; each group decided on its own format
- *Results*: Very mixed; only one was sustained (for 3 semesters)
- *Lessons*: Clearly convey the level of commitment required; when groups decide their own format, have at least one strong and experienced writer



CONHI, Iteration 3, 2013: a model that is working

We brainstormed about ongoing impediments to sustainability:

TIME: Not having enough of it to write or review

Solution: Ask that submissions be short (2-3 pages) so that everyone can write and submit a week before, and everyone has time to read

CONSISTENCY: Make sure people have a dependable time to meet

Solution: We meet each fall and spring semester, every other Wednesday, from 12:00 until 1:00, so that people can plan



CONHI, Iteration 3: more obstacles

RELUCTANCE TO JOIN OR PRESENT: Especially an issue for junior faculty, since now more senior faculty are participating

Solution: We have set protocol, but faculty are unfailingly gentle and helpful, and we have the reputation of being supportive

FLEXIBILITY: Faculty concern that they could not honor time assigned to submit or read

Solution: Trade slots if something comes up; encourage in-person attendance but allow for phoning in if necessary



A few logistics that have helped: schedule

Author Submission to DropBox Date	Meeting Date	Draft Author	Primary Readers
Jan 20	Jan 27	Sam Snead	D. Hagler, N. Moore
Feb 3	Feb 10	Martina Hingis	Sam Snead
Feb 3	Feb 10	Wilma Rudolph	Russell Means
Feb 17	Feb 24	Toshiko Takaezu	Lionel Messi
Feb 17	Feb 24	Isabel Allende	Wilma Rudolph
Mar 16	Mar 23	María Martínez	Ichiro Suzuki
Mar 16	Mar 23	Russell Means	Serena Williams
Mar 30	April 6	Ichiro Suzuki	Isabel Allende
Mar 30	April 6	Lionel Messi	Toshiko Takaezu
April 13	April 20	Sam Snead	María Martínez
April 13	April 20	Serena Williams	Martina Hingis



More logistical advice

- Use Dropbox: allows everyone to comment in separate author files, even if they can't make the meeting; makes schedule always accessible
- Debbie and I read and comment on all
- We swap organizational duties each semester, including weekly reminders, and we back up each other



We know we are on the right track because . . .

- Many faculty have returned each semester, and new faculty join each semester
- Everyone, including the dean, gives us kudos on productivity and the collegiality
- Our lively discussions help authors identify audiences and journals, hone arguments and presentations, and share experiences and tips
- Many pieces have been published, including one that was the subject of an article in the *New York Times*



Mission-Focused Faculty Writing Groups

- There are two main types of faculty writing groups:
 - General
 - Mission specific
- In 2014 the Division of Research at Texas A&M University began offering a Faculty Writing Group focused specifically on the NSF CAREER program for new faculty
- Faculty participation has doubled in each of the two succeeding years
- Faculty participation is equal from both STEM and non-STEM colleges and departments.



NSF CAREER Program

- The NSF CAREER Program:
 - Available only to non-tenured faculty
 - 5-year award
 - Budget \$400,000 to \$500,000 depending on discipline (including IDC)
 - Faculty may apply to the program a total of three times
 - Awardees are also eligible for the PCASE award (Presidential Early Career Awards for Scientists and Engineers)



CAREER Writing Group Structure

- March through May
 - Faculty meet from mid-March through mid-May in two parallel groups
 - Scheduled around M-W-F, and T-Th teaching schedules
 - Guest speakers (former Project Officers, and faculty who have served on CAREER panels)
 - Faculty typically attend as their calendar allows
 - The unique structure of the CAREER proposal is explained
 - “Assignments” are given to participants at each meeting
 - Summary of research project idea for discussion with group
 - Visit with Department Head, and call to Program Officer
 - Draft of Project Summary Page
 - First page of Project description
 - Education Plan and Broader Impacts section



CAREER Writing Group Structure

- May through Submission Deadline
 - Faculty meet from mid-May through submission with facilitator
 - Scheduled at the convenience of faculty participants
 - Consultation sessions typically last 45 to 60 minutes
 - Facilitator works in collaboration with faculty participants providing feedback
 - As each proposal subsection draft is completed
 - As the final draft is completed
 - Connects faculty with subject matter experts
 - Compliance
 - Data Management Plan
 - Post-Doc mentoring Plan (if necessary)
 - Submission



CAREER Writing Group Benefits for Faculty

- Creation of a Painless, Structured, Well-in-Advance Approach to Proposal Development
 - Junior Faculty Learn the Benefits of Long-Term Proposal Development Planning
- Instruction in Proposal Writing Best Practices
 - For the CAREER Proposal in particular
 - For NSF proposals in general
- Introduction to Fellow Junior Faculty across the University
- Exposure to the Varied Types of Research Professional Development available through the Research Development Services Group



CAREER Writing Group: Essential Skills Learned

- Collaborative proposal writing process teaches faculty essentials as they write
- The structure of the meetings over time keeps faculty participants moving forward, and teaches writing task prioritization
- Faculty do develop smaller groups (pairs or threes typically) in which they share insights and experiences outside the group
- Participants are very attentive to the research ideas and processes of colleagues in other disciplines and very often make excellent suggestions for improvements to proposal sub-sections



- Questions?
- Comments?
- Any experiences to share?