The University Writing Center

Updated 8-2013
*Portions of this handbook are based on a similar handbook from the University of Delaware and are used with permission.
# Table of Contents

- What is the Writing Mentors Program? ................................................................. 3
- Who are the Writing Mentors? ........................................................................... 4
- What are the benefits of the Writing Mentors Program? ................................ 4
- What can a Writing Mentor do in my class? ..................................................... 5
- What are my responsibilities as a participant in the Writing Mentors program? ............... 6
- What should I keep in mind when considering how to involve a Writing Mentor in my class? ... 7
- What should I keep in mind when scheduling activities with the Writing Mentor? .............. 8
- What are some other tips for making the Writing Mentor Program a success in my class? .... 10
- Appendix A: Writing Mentor Activity Plan/Agreement Form ............................... 11
- Appendix B: Sample syllabus statement .................................................................. 12
- Appendix C: Sample FAQ for students .................................................................... 13
What is the Writing Mentors Program?
The Writing Mentors Program was launched in the fall of 2013 as part of the university’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), “Write Where You Belong.” The Writing Mentors Program is a peer-consulting program in which undergraduate and graduate students assist students and faculty members in discipline-specific writing-intensive courses.

Writing Mentors can read students’ writing, offer constructive comments, hold individual writing conferences with students, and provide additional writing assistance (as determined in consultation with the course instructor). A common model at other universities is to have Writing Mentors comment on drafts of a writing assignment and hold conferences with students, who then revise their work based on that feedback prior to submitting a final draft to the course instructor for grading. We encourage you, however, to negotiate a wider range of activities—from guiding brainstorming sessions to facilitating peer review, to leading mini-lessons on writing topics—with your Writing Mentor.

Writing Mentors deal with composition issues such as understanding an assignment, brainstorming, developing a focus/thesis, organizing and formatting, researching and using sources, and editing strategies. They do not proofread writing for students, assign grades, comment on the substance of the course, or act as teaching assistants.

The Writing Mentors Program operates on at least five key assumptions:

1) Writing is a recursive process that generally involves prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing.

2) A Writing Mentor should help student writers to develop effective writing strategies rather than just helping them to “fix” individual assignments. Writing Mentors’ comments, thus, often take the form of questions or requests rather than directives. A question, such as “How does this piece of evidence support your point?” is more likely to promote and encourage revision than a judgmental comment such as “Poor use of evidence.” Additionally, questions raised by Mentors can help students discover the questions that they need to ask themselves as they write future texts.

3) When working with a peer consultant, students retain responsibility for their writing. In other words, students need not accept every suggestion that a Writing Mentor makes. Rather, they should consider the Writing Mentor’s questions and revise as they believe is best. A Writing Mentor may ask, for example, how a particular piece of evidence supports the point being made. In response, the student can select one of three options for revision: a) remove the piece of evidence entirely; b) keep the evidence but make more explicit its connection to the point; or c) leave the evidence as it appears in the draft (if s/he feels that the Mentor’s question is not one that the intended audience for the assignment will have).

4) All writers, regardless of amount of experience or prior achievement, can benefit from individualized feedback on writing.
5) An embedded writing consultant benefits both faculty and students. She or he can help students understand and meet the expectations of course assignments while also helping faculty to understand and meet students’ writing needs.

Who are the Writing Mentors?
Writing Mentors are peer consultants who work with students in specific writing intensive courses. Mentors act as facilitators for good writing, both inside and outside the classroom, by offering suggestions for revision and discussing strategies that will enable students to communicate their thoughts and ideas effectively.

Undergraduate students who serve as Writing Mentors are typically high-achieving sophomores, juniors and seniors who have been recommended by faculty who teach WI courses in the disciplines, although interested students are welcome to participate as well. Following a faculty recommendation or individual expression of interest, students are invited to take English 4530, "Seminar in Peer Tutoring." This course provides future Writing Mentors with extensive preparation in writing and tutoring, and acquaints them with current research in composition and writing center practice. Those who successfully complete the course and who demonstrate strong people skills and an eagerness to help others improve their writing are placed in WI courses across the university.

Graduate students who serve as Writing Mentors must complete an application process and, once accepted into the Program, must gain at least one semester of experience as a writing consultant in the University Writing Center.

Once assigned to specific courses, Writing Mentors meet regularly with the Director of the University Writing Center who supervises their work. They also meet several times each semester for professional development and to discuss strategies for helping student writers.

What are the benefits of the Writing Mentors Program?
Faculty, students, and Writing Mentors can gain from the program in myriad ways. The list below provides just a sampling of potential benefits:

• The presence of a Writing Mentor in a course emphasizes to students that, indeed, writing is a very important component of the course and the discipline.
• A Writing Mentor allows for more individualized feedback than is possible with just one faculty member.
• The program encourages students to think about writing for a reader and instills in them the best of writing practices: revision.
• The program helps students build confidence in their writing skills.
• Since Writing Mentors are helping their peers, not grading them, students often feel freer to ask questions, and they can take risks in trying to extend their writing abilities without fear of criticism.
• A Writing Mentor can provide a faculty member with valuable insights into how students struggle with particular writing assignments. These insights can help faculty
develop more successful assignments for future courses.

- Participating in the Writing Mentors program provides an impressive credential and often leads to stronger writing skills for the Mentors themselves.

**What can a Writing Mentor do in my class?**

The Writing Mentor should meet with each student at least once during the semester. A common model used in similar programs at other universities involves a carefully scheduled process in which students submit a draft of their written work by a specific deadline (see the “What are my responsibilities” section below for details) to the Writing Mentor, who makes constructive suggestions for revision. The Writing Mentor returns the work to the students and arranges to meet with them individually to discuss their work and answer questions. Students then revise the project and submit both versions to the faculty member for evaluation and a grade.

While each instructor and Writing Mentor will determine the precise nature and structure of the work that the Writing Mentor will do, some additional activities that Writing Mentors might engage in include:

- Meeting with students in face-to-face or virtual environments at any stage of their writing (prewriting, drafting/writing, revising, editing, etc.).
- Meeting with students in small groups, either during in-class sessions (ex. peer review) or out-of-class tutoring sessions in the Writing Center.
- Leading short workshops on writing topics or issues such as introductions, thesis statements, clarity/concision, plagiarism, proper citation (APA, MLA, CSE, Chicago, etc.), conclusions, etc.

It is also important to keep in mind that a Writing Mentor is **not**

- A guarantee that all, or even most, students in the course will succeed or improve as writers.
- A proofreader or editor for students in the class.
- A teaching assistant capable of taking the place of the instructor in the classroom.
- A grader of student writing.

**What are my responsibilities as a participant in the Writing Mentors program?**

The following guidelines, in line with best practices, will help you make working with a Mentor as productive as possible. As an instructor working with a Writing Mentor, you should

1) Require that all students in the course work with the Writing Mentor. If this is not a meaningful requirement built into the course for all students, weaker writers might resist working with the Mentor, viewing her or his services as “remedial” or as punishment for poor performance. Conversely, writers who have been generally successful might feel that they do not need the program. However, because talented writers often rely heavily on intuition, they sometimes lack awareness of the reasons why their writing succeeds or fails. A central goal of the Mentor program is to help
students gain control over their prose by increasing their awareness of how they write.

2) Ensure that your Writing Mentor works no more than 150 hours per semester (time attending class meetings counts toward this total). Writing Mentors will submit weekly timesheets to the Director of the University Writing Center detailing the activities they have participated in and how much time they have spent on each activity.

3) Ensure that your Writing Mentor has at least one week to review and respond for every 10-12 student drafts (where drafts are in the 1000-1500 word range). This time frame should be adjusted accordingly for longer drafts and/or for more than 10-12 drafts, and more time should be allotted if the mentor will be conferencing with the students as well. Keep in mind, too, that a Mentor should not be expected to respond to drafts during or after the last week of classes when they have final papers and exams in the courses that they are taking. Many Mentors will also have mid-terms and mid-semester projects due, so you may want to avoid scheduling responses to drafts at that time as well. In all cases, be sure to communicate regularly and openly with your Mentor so that the timing and the workload are manageable.

4) Meet with your Writing Mentor during the first week of classes (or earlier) to set up a plan for how and when the Mentor will participate in the course. At your first meeting, you should

- Complete and sign the “Writing Mentor Activity Plan/Agreement Form” (See Appendix A) indicating that you and your Mentor have reviewed program guidelines and have established a mutually agreeable plan for the Mentor’s participation in the course.
- Determine expectations for the Mentor’s attendance at class meetings. Keep in mind that Mentors work a total of 150 hours per semester. You and your Mentor will need to determine how to split that time in a way that will allow for the Mentor to effectively provide the writing support you desire for your students while also keeping in mind the Mentor’s other academic responsibilities.
- Provide your Mentor with a copy of the syllabus, copies of all major writing assignment descriptions, and a course calendar. **If at all possible, convey these items via email to your Mentor so that s/he can review them prior to your meeting; this will enable the Mentor to come to the meeting prepared with information about when his/her schedule potentially conflicts with assignments and some suggestions for how s/he might best help the student writers in the course.**
- Establish procedures, dates, and times for the Mentor to collect, comment on, and return drafts. It is important to remember that Writing Mentors often carry a full course load in addition to their work for the program. The timing of responding and conferencing needs to be planned out in advance.
- Share ways to contact each other—phone numbers, e-mail addresses, etc.
- Explain your pet peeves about writing: this will help the Mentor to help your students avoid them.
5) Introduce your Writing Mentor to your class as early in the semester as possible. It is best if the Mentor interacts with students during the first or two weeks of the semester, even if a writing assignment is not due until later. This will familiarize the students with the Mentor and make later interaction proceed more smoothly.

6) Meet with your Mentor outside of class time before and after each assignment cycle to discuss expectations, to review the Writing Mentor’s work, to share impressions of student writing, and to discuss ideas for helping students improve as writers.

7) Provide a brief mid-semester status report of the Writing Mentor’s work to the Director of the QEP, who will share the report with the Director of the University Writing Center. You will receive further information about this status report.

8) Participate in assessment of the Writing Mentors program by completing an evaluation and by having your students complete a short survey about the Writing Mentor’s work in your course. More information about your evaluation and the survey for students will be distributed later in the semester.

What should I keep in mind when considering how to involve a Writing Mentor in my class?

Here are some questions to consider as you work with your Mentor to determine the nature of his/her involvement. The questions begin with broad considerations and moving into the specific and the practical:

1) What are your overall goals for your students? What kinds of thinking and writing do you want them to work towards?


3) How engaged with the writing process do you plan to be? Are you going to read drafts yourself?

4) Given your answers to the above questions, what form of Writing Mentor involvement will most benefit your students? At what stages of the writing process? For example, if you plan to read and comment on all drafts, it might be more productive to have the Writing Mentor do something else, such as meeting with students earlier to brainstorm and outline ideas.

Also keep in mind that all students in the course must work with the Writing Mentor in some way. Otherwise, as mentioned earlier, weaker writers might resist working with the Mentor, viewing her or his services as “remedial” or as punishment for poor performance. Conversely, writers who have been generally successful might feel that they do not need the program. However, because talented writers often rely heavily on intuition, they often lack awareness of the reasons why their writing succeeds or fails.

Generally, multiple meetings between each student and the Mentor are most effective, and often the best work happens later in the course, when the students and Writing Mentor know each other better.

If you only assign one large project, your Writing Mentor might meet with students at
various times during their research and writing processes over the course of the semester. If you have many smaller projects, you might have the Writing Mentor meet with students for selected projects rather than for each one.

Regardless of how you and the Mentor decide to structure her or his involvement, be sure to consider students' participation in this program as a vital part of your course. It may help to include a description of the Writing Mentors Program and the name and contact information of the Writing Mentor in your syllabus (see Appendix B). This is a good place to emphasize the benefits of the program to your students, and to let students know they are required to meet with the Writing Mentor. Comments you make in class can clarify and reinforce this written information.

What should I keep in mind when scheduling activities with the Writing Mentor?
To help you think about how to structure the time that the Mentor spends working with students, assume that the Mentor will spend 45 minutes reading and responding to each student draft (if that draft is in the 1000-1500 word range), and 45 minutes conferencing with each student. This makes 1.5 hours per student per draft, or, for a class of 25 students, a total of 37.5 hours. Keep in mind, too, that these hours need to be distributed so that the Mentor has the necessary one-week to respond to each set of 10-12 drafts. Again, more time per draft per student will be needed if the drafts are longer.

If you are considering other kinds of activities, you can use a similar method of to calculate hours required for different tasks. The table below provides a sample breakdown of a Mentor’s semester hours. This sample is just to help you think about how best to use the Mentor’s time; there are many, many other options:
Table 1. Sample Writing Mentor Activity Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Time per student</th>
<th>Hours Total (for class of 25 students)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductions to students (in class or via Blackboard or other media)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping students brainstorm ideas</td>
<td>Project 1</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping students develop outlines/concept maps/ etc.</td>
<td>Project 1</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing, responding to, and conferencing on draft</td>
<td>Project 1</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting student groups (3-4 students) in library for source searching</td>
<td>Project 2</td>
<td>1 hour per group</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading peer review draft workshops with student groups (3-4 students)</td>
<td>Project 2</td>
<td>1.5 hours per group</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping students develop outlines/concept maps/ etc.</td>
<td>Project 3</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing, responding to, and conferencing on draft</td>
<td>Project 3</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting students with preparing materials for QEP Assessment</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>146 Hours Total*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*--It is a good idea to allow for a cushion in hours planned.

Please keep in mind that Writing Mentors are top students who carry a full course load in addition to their work for the program. Therefore, please do not request that Writing Mentors comment on a set of 10-12 papers in less than a week, or during or after the last week of classes (they have final papers and exams to take as well).

When creating a schedule for writing assignments, keep in mind, too, that students will need time to revise after meeting with the Writing Mentor. In general, it is helpful if students complete one writing cycle before beginning the next.

What are some other tips for making the Writing Mentor Program a success in my class?

- The way you introduce the program at the beginning of the semester influences your students' response to it. It is helpful if you emphasize that the Writing Mentors Program is an integral part of the course and is required of all students. If you wish, and schedule permitting, have your Writing Mentor come to class on the day that you introduce the program.

- Talk with the Writing Mentor regularly about aspects of assignments or areas of writing that are particularly troubling for students. Writing Mentors are often the first to know when students are confused about assignments. We encourage you to discuss assignment expectations with your Writing Mentor, and seek out feedback from the
Mentor about areas in which students struggle with assignments.

- Your students’ work with the Writing Mentor will go more smoothly if they know what to expect. For example, be sure that students know that the Writing Mentor will not “fix” their paper or issue directions; instead, they will ask questions and make suggestions in order to help the student take control in improving their writing.

- If you have any concerns about the Mentor you are working with or the Mentor Program in general, please contact the QEP Director as soon as those concerns arise so that she and the Director of the University Writing Program can address them quickly.

- Additional tips to facilitate the timely submission of materials for Writing Mentor review include
  - Indicating "Writing Mentor Due Dates" or "Due Date of First Draft" and "Final Due Dates" on your class calendar.
  - Reminding your students that only faculty—not Writing Mentors—can give extensions for late papers. Additionally, if you choose to grant an extension for a late assignment, please make sure the Writing Mentor has adequate time for responding to the draft.
  - Having students submit their drafts directly to you rather than a Writing Mentor; this helps keep your students on a schedule and ensures that the Mentor does not have to field student queries regarding submission deadlines or feel obligated to remind students to turn in their drafts (you get to do that!).
Appendix A: Writing Mentor Activity Plan/Agreement Form

The course instructor and the Writing Mentor should fill in the chart below with details of how the Mentor will participate in the course. These plans may change as the two of you get a better sense of how your students need assistance, but it is important to have a plan going into the semester so that you both have an understanding of expectations and are comfortable with the amount and kinds of tutoring activities.

Then, please sign, date, and return this form to Dr. Wendy Sharer, QEP Director, 1009B Joyner Library, Mail Stop 516 or email it as an attachment to sharerw@ecu.edu.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor Activity</th>
<th>Course Assignment</th>
<th>Est. time per student</th>
<th>Est. date/due date</th>
<th>Hours Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Faculty Signature_________________________________________ Date____________

PRINT NAME_____________________________________________

Writing Mentor Signature____________________________________ Date____________

PRINT NAME_____________________________________________
Appendix B: Sample syllabus statement

Writing Mentor
Shavon Sanchez- sanchezs12@students.ecu.edu

In this section of ENGL 4444, you have the added advantage of working with Shavon Sanchez, a Writing Mentor. A Writing Mentor is an advanced student who has been trained to assist you in all stages of the writing process, from brainstorming and researching to drafting and revising. Shavon will not edit your work for you, but she will help you develop your own writing skills.

This semester, you will have mandatory conferences with Shavon for two of your three projects, and you must submit a draft of the project to me at least one full week before that conference (see course calendar).

Failure to submit your draft by the deadline and/or to attend your conference with Shavon will result in a one-letter-grade deduction on the project.
Appendix C: Sample FAQ Handout

The Writing Mentors Program
Frequently Asked Questions

Who are the Writing Mentors?
The Writing Mentors are upperclassmen who have been selected through a competitive application process and who have been trained in a semester-long seminar in the theory and practice of tutoring writing. Mentors are selected from many disciplines on the basis of their writing skills and their desire to help other students improve those skills.

What DOES a Writing Mentor do?
Writing Mentors are ECU undergraduates or graduate students who are prepared to help you with generating ideas, developing a thesis, improving your project’s organization, sharpening its focus, and the other elements of academic writing. The specifics of your interaction with your Writing Mentor will be explained by your professor, as it varies depending on the class.

What DOESN’T a Writing Mentor do?
A Writing Mentor does not proofread, does not have the authority to grant extensions, and does not assign or comment on your grades. Questions about grades, extensions, or specifics of course content should be directed to your professor.

What does my Writing Mentor expect from me?
You are expected to show up for any scheduled meetings or conference on time and prepared to discuss your writing. Please bring all related materials with you—your draft, notes, assignment handout, etc.

**This list of FAQ’s will be expanded as the program grows.**