Romancing the Muse

Faculty Writing Institutes as Professional Development

*Elizabeth Ambos, Mark Wiley, Terre H. Allen
California State University, Long Beach*

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A faculty professional writing program called the Scholarly Writing Institute (SWI) at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) presents a replicable model to accelerate and support faculty writing. Based on Boice's (1990, 1994, 2000) work in faculty research productivity, the program combines individual writing time with editing and statistical consultation, panel discussions by prolific faculty, and reflective reporting of writing outcomes. Held over a three- to four-day period during semester breaks, the Institute is particularly accessible to faculty with family responsibilities. Evaluations indicate participant satisfaction with the experience and attitudinal change about successful writing strategies.

Higher education demands faculty accountability in both teaching and research (Kreber & Cranton, 2000), and faculty struggle with the degree to which these activities are complementary, as opposed to competitive (see Fox, 1992). The ideal outcome is

the successful integration of teaching and research activities (Kreber & Cranton, 2000). So how can faculty development activities help faculty manage the balancing act that brings together teaching and research in mutual, rather than competitive, ways? Faculty development programs should address these primary aspects of faculty worklife, collaborating with other campus units to provide coordinated activities relating to teaching and research.

Why is the coordination of teaching and research activities of value to California State University, Long Beach (CSULB)? We are a large urban, comprehensive, master's-granting state university. We enroll approximately 37,000 students and employ 1,100 full-time and about 1,000 part-time faculty; the university has grown in stature and size during the last decade. CSULB ranks very favorably on a number of national and regional academic criteria, including for its combination of affordability and quality. Teaching is emphasized at the university, with routine teaching assignments of three to four courses per semester. Due to the increasing professional aspirations of recently hired tenure-track faculty and the competitiveness among applicants for coveted tenure-track positions, scholarship has gained more prominence and is a significant factor in tenure and promotion decisions.

The CSULB faculty development program partners with the Office of University Research to provide workshops and institutes on faculty research that complement the array of teaching workshops offered by faculty development. We believe that our united efforts communicate to faculty that teaching and research activities are mutual rather than competitive. We have codeveloped several programs that have been integrated into our faculty development menu and designed them to complement teaching-based programs. One of these programs—the Scholarly Writing Institute (SWI)—is the focus of this chapter. Other jointly sponsored programs include grant-writing and grant-management institutes.

After briefly reviewing the literature on writing productivity, with particular focus on Boice's (1990, 1994, 2000) work, we detail the activities of the SWI and faculty participants' evaluations of the Institute's effects and effectiveness. We conclude with a summary of lessons learned from offering SWIs and indicate future directions for our programs.

Anxiety About Writing

Writing is a necessary part of faculty life and, for many faculty, an important source of professional vitality and accomplishment. For others, it is more of a dreaded chore. The “publish or perish” maxim is a governing reality of faculty existence and a source of much anxiety. One must publish regularly and keep up with the competition or lose status and, possibly, employment. Although periodic anxiety may be a normal aspect of any career, high levels of it can paralyze faculty, particularly those engaged in professional writing post-Ph.D. and those navigating the perilous shoals of the tenure and promotion process. This anxiety is compounded when individual faculty members lack sufficient knowledge of publishing requirements and do not know how to deal with conflicting or negative reviews of their writing. In addition, many members of the professoriate need assistance in developing an efficient, structured, and time-effective writing process. For most new faculty members, few if any of these topics were covered in their doctoral programs—a critical deficiency, in our opinion (also see Bloom, 1985; Hjortshoj, 2001).

Boice’s (1990) seminal work on professors as writers focuses on the premise that professors often approach writing as an overwhelming, singular, all-consuming experience. The reasons for this approach probably stem from writing a dissertation, which most Ph.D. candidates experience as a concentrated practice and foremost imperative in their lives for several years. Transitioning from Ph.D. candidate to the faculty ranks carries with it a shift to multiple roles and responsibilities and a change of focus from a single-minded pursuit of scholarship to obligations to teach and give service, in addition to conducting research. Moreover, as Hjortshoj (2001) points out, this transition is further complicated by faculty isolation: “[y]oung professors learn to write for publication much as they learn to teach: almost entirely through trial and error, with little direct guidance from colleagues” (p. 121).

Faculty may try to return to the single-minded focus but find that they cannot allocate writing time in the ways they formerly enjoyed. Thus, the “binge writer” is born—a faculty member who reserves a block of several days, usually at the end of a grueling

semester, into which she pours her scholarly energy in exhausting, round-the-clock writing sessions, and from which she expects manuscripts ready for submission to foremost journals and publishing houses. Although binge writing is a successful strategy for some writers, it fails for most. Moreover, binge writers experience the “high” highs of the adrenaline rush of completing a difficult project and meeting a tight deadline, but after the latest challenge has been successfully surmounted, they sink into a “low” low, as they anticipate another writing project looming in the not-too-distant future—a future just far enough off to allow for substantial procrastination. Instead of being trapped in this emotional roller coaster, Boice (1990, 1994, 2000) persuasively advocates becoming a stable, consistent writer who practices “moderation”—that is, writing regularly for short periods of time.

Application of Boice’s Research

We have adapted key features of Boice’s (1990) model in the SWI by having participants practice focused writing for relatively brief periods over several days. The four key elements of Boice’s extended, individualized program are infused into our concentrated writing institute. We focus on the first element of “automaticity”—the “getting writing going”—by sharing strategies for generating writing. We encourage participants to take on only small parts of larger projects during the Institute. This conscious division of large writing projects into smaller, more manageable tasks counters the tendency most faculty writers have to set unrealistic goals of writing quantity and perfection. The second element is “externality.” During the Institute, the actual work of writing is given the highest priority, and participants are reminded continually about committing to that priority after the Institute. The third element, “self-control,” and the fourth, “sociality,” reinforce each other, as participants learn to monitor their own negative thoughts and substitute more positive thoughts about writing. This process occurs as participants get to know one another and begin sharing their own stories about writing habits, including all of their anxieties, self-doubts, and procrastinating behaviors. Through both informal shoptalk and formal

panel discussions with faculty experts, participants learn more productive ways to think about themselves as writers and to deal with negative reviews. We also encourage them to read and respond to each other's work and to silence, as much as possible, that internal critic who, in the past, may have too easily derailed a writing project scarcely under way.

Based on SWI applications and on our discussions with faculty who have participated in these Institutes over the last five years, the single most frequently identified factor that affects an individual's writing productivity is the shortage of available time. When faculty members are on campus, they are in class or holding formal office hours, or they are in their offices with the door open. Students and faculty colleagues frequently take advantage of a faculty member's open-door practice. SWI participants cite other distractions at work, including telephone calls and the constant stream of e-mail. Many have repeatedly told us that they feel compelled to respond, whether to drop-in visitors, phone calls, or e-mail. This fragmentation of time leads to frustration when faculty face sustained writing projects, such as books and journal articles.

Through the Institutes, faculty begin to qualify and understand what they mean by "time to write" and to develop coping strategies to deal with the fragmentation of the writing process. Initially, they firmly attest that they require uninterrupted blocks of time to do their writing. Although we build in several two- to two-and-a-half-hour blocks for writing during the SWI, we also encourage participants to continue to devote smaller blocks of time to writing throughout the three- to four-day workshop. The productivity possible during relatively short writing time blocks is a revelation to most faculty. Prior to SWI, many assumed that six to eight hours of completely uninterrupted writing time are needed to make any progress in their writing. Discovery that as few as one or two solid hours can be as productive as six to eight fragmented hours leads SWI participants to "rewire" their writing process to use shorter time spans. Boice (1990) suggests that even thirty minutes of writing per day can be effective. However, most of our participants find this allotment of time insufficient and prefer at least one to two hours a day.

As a follow-up to the SWI, we also encourage participants to set aside small blocks of time for writing during each week,

preferably each day, and to protect this time from all who might make demands on them, including colleagues, department chairs, and family. Certainly, it is easier for anyone to identify a one- to two-hour time block than a six- to eight-hour contiguous amount of time. We suggest that participants firmly communicate their writing intentions ahead of time to colleagues and family members.

Faculty participants have expressed gratitude to us for organizing these Institutes because they claim that *we* have given them “permission to write.” The “we,” by extension, includes the university administration. In addition, the clear message that resonates from the partnership of CSULB’s Office of University Research and the Faculty Center for Professional Development is that teaching and research are both valued and supported by the administration.

The CSULB Scholarly Writing Institute

Boice’s (1990) model for writing productivity provided the theoretical underpinnings for the development of the Institute. Our program mimics key elements of Boice’s extended program (during which he might work with individuals for several weeks or months). However, ours takes a short-term approach intended to help faculty jump-start a stalled project or realize how they might alter their self-perceptions and behaviors as writers. Our Institute participants experience a mixture of group interaction, informal subgroup interactions, and substantial blocks of time set aside for individual writing.

Institute Design

We have offered the SWI ten times thus far on the CSULB campus. The first five Institutes were two and one-half days in length, although some faculty members stayed for a third day. However, in response to participants’ evaluations, we added an extra full day to the most recent Institute. Although the design has varied from one Institute to another, depending on faculty needs, these elements have been maintained: sustained

writing time, time for participants to talk with one another about the processes involved in producing scholarly writing, and resources for the participants such as assistance with editing, statistical analyses, and particular software programs. We also keep a ready supply of food and drink handy and try to minimize distractions. Funding for the Institute is provided by the Office of University Research from a special fund for research stimulation.

The application process occurs several months before the Institute. Applicants are asked to identify writing projects and to set realistic goals for the Institute. (See a typical application form at www.csulb.edu/divisions/aa/research/our/education/swi/.) What is a realistic goal? Of course, that depends on the nature of the writing project and the faculty member's degree of preparedness to write. Because faculty from across the university may participate, many from the natural and physical sciences have done all of their research in the laboratory and must now write up their findings. By contrast, humanities scholars may be composing long journal articles and regularly consulting text sources as they write, so their goals might be sections of a manuscript. Other participants intend to draft a grant proposal or a book prospectus to send out for review. We learned after the initial Institute to advise faculty that they should not expect to complete the final draft of that long-put-off journal article. We offer this caution because there are often psychological reasons that the writer has been putting the project off for months or years (see Boice, 1990)—reasons that may cause procrastination behavior during the Institute (for example, the temptation to take lots of breaks and spend more time talking to one of our editors than actually writing). We discuss the psychological barriers to writing during the Institute, bringing these nonproductive behaviors out in the open and thus beginning to change them.

Several SWIs have included a lunch meeting a few weeks before. The purpose of those meetings is to save a little of the precious Institute time in explaining to prospective participants the workshop format, what they can expect to happen during the Institute, and what we expect from them. We answer any

questions and encourage faculty to talk about themselves and their interest in the Institute. This initial social bonding reduces individual anxiety and creates social networks to help faculty feel more comfortable talking about their writing and any attendant problems they might be having. Most important, we stress that the SWI is designed to help faculty accelerate their writing productivity or change their attitudes and behaviors toward writing; it is *not* a “remedial” activity for those who have failed at scholarship. No doubt, a few participants harbor these debilitating thoughts, so we consciously characterize the Institute as an opportunity to complete substantial work on a pressing project. Any perception of SWI as remedial has been dispelled by participation of a range of CSULB faculty, including practiced, productive writers.

Institute Activities

We accept most applicants—an average of thirty per Institute—as long as they present realistic writing goals on a significant project or two. Many participants repeat the experience. One Institute is offered in June near the beginning of the summer break and another in early January, just before the spring term—periods during which most faculty have the time to participate. Our June Institute is scheduled right after graduation ceremonies, before faculty are leaving for well-deserved vacations or summer research trips and well before summer break begins for children attending K–12. (Scheduling the SWI around K–12 school schedules is seen as an expression of the university administration’s understanding of and commitment to the program.) We do insist that participants work in specific conference areas and not leave to return to their campus offices. The temptation to engage in other business in one’s office is too great and allows for too many distractions.

During the opening session, participants introduce themselves and explain their personal goals for the Institute. The provost and vice presidents often make brief appearances to offer words of welcome, encouragement, and support, further enhancing the stature and prominence of this program. College deans may drop in to visit or to have lunch with participants.

Although we are still experimenting with the seating arrangement, we have previously seated participants side-by-side at small tables or kiosks. We encourage them to bring their laptops and research materials with them; we make a few laptops available for those who forgot to bring one or don't own one. Wireless Internet connectivity, printer capabilities (including color printers), and computing consultants are provided throughout the Institute.

We set aside at least two periods of two to two-and-a-half hours for individual writing per day, and participants are invited to stay after the final lunch on the third day to continue writing if they so choose, but without technical and editorial assistance. During the extended writing periods, participants are expected to work quietly on their own without disturbing others, but they are also free to meet for half-hour appointments with one of the writing editors or technical consultants. These consultants were selected, based either on recommendations from their department chairs, from their supervisors, or on our experiences collaborating with these experts on other projects. We also sought experts who we believed would work well with our participants and who expressed interest in and enthusiasm for these consultative activities. The consultation area is physically distinct from the main writing area so that conversations don't disturb active writers. These experts help participants with editing and proofreading, as well as statistical analyses, data presentation, and computer illustration and presentation software. Experienced faculty and administrators also offer consultations in human subject protocol and intellectual property, as well as researching journals for application formats and citation statistics, reference list software, information databases, and issues of retention, tenure, and promotion.

Finally, we offer an assortment of panel presentations on relevant topics such as overcoming writing barriers, responding to rejection comments by reviewers, managing time, and writing productively, featuring some of the university's most prolific faculty. We use participants' evaluations to modify our panel offerings and avoid repeating panels because some faculty attend more than one SWI. Table 7.1 presents a typical daily SWI schedule.

Table 7.1 Typical Daily Schedule for the Scholarly Writing Institute

<i>Schedule</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Description</i>
8:30–9:00 A.M.	Breakfast, orientation, sign-in	Director, Office of University Research (OUR); Director, Faculty Center for Professional Development (FCPD)
9:00–9:30 A.M.	Introductions and expectations. What progress have you made in your writing? What work do you plan to do today? Do you have any special writing issues?	Directors joined by provost; each faculty attendee gives a one minute description of their writing project
9:45 –12:00 A.M.	Writing Session	Faculty experts available by appointment for editing and statistical consultation
12:00–1:00 P.M.	Lunch	Cohosted by OUR and FCPD
1:00–2:00 P.M.	Faculty panel discussion: “The Dark Side of Research and Writing”	Faculty panel moderated by FCPD Director talks about their experiences as writers, including dealing with adverse reviews and delays in journal publishing
2:00–4:15 P.M.	Writing Session	Faculty experts available by appointment
4:15–4:45 P.M.	Social Hour	Guest: Associate Vice President for Academic Personnel

Assessment of Institute Outcomes

We have conducted an assessment of outcomes from the first three years of our Institute (2004–2006), during which 163 faculty have participated one or more times. Twenty-six attended two or more Institutes, and one has participated in all six. About 13 percent of the participants are adjunct faculty, about 60 percent assistant professors, about 20 percent associate professors, and about 7 percent full professors. Females dominate attendance by about 4 to 1—a noteworthy statistic because only 48 percent of our faculty is female.

At lunch on the final day, we ask all participants to share their perceptions of the writing experience, reflect thoughtfully on their writing accomplishments, and complete a formal, written assessment survey of the Institute, containing both Likert-style and open-ended questions. Specifically, we ask how satisfied participants are overall with the experience, whether they accomplished their set goals, and what they liked most and least. There are also items about individual features of the Institute, such as the food, the venue, the editors, and specific sessions such as the panel discussion. Finally, we ask participants if they would attend another SWI and if they would recommend it to their colleagues.

The Institute assessment survey was distributed to 160 participants, 134 of whom returned completed forms, for a response rate of 83 percent. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents rated the Institute as highly valuable or valuable, and only one of these 134 indicated that it was not valuable. Literally 100 percent of the respondents said that they would recommend the Institute to colleagues, and 93 percent said they expected it to enhance their scholarly writing productivity. Participants were also asked to evaluate all the activities provided during the Institute, including panel presentations, small-group discussions, and editing and statistical consultations. Although small-group discussions received mixed ratings, 96 percent ranked the editing and statistical consultations as the most valuable Institute activity, beyond the time to write.

This precious writing time received the highest ratings. At first glance, this does not seem surprising or particularly interesting, but consider that we (those of us who sponsor and organize these Institutes) are not actually “creating” additional time for faculty

writing. We simply invite participants to dedicate their time to write over three to five days. Are we, as Institute sponsors, being perceived as somehow giving these participants the permission to write? If this is the case, what does that say about the mind-set of our colleagues who cannot or will not allow themselves time to write if they perceive it as interfering with other duties, such as teaching, service, and family obligations?

In answering the open-ended questions, participants wrote that they appreciated the supportive environment, the consultant faculty, the general collegiality, and the constant supply of food. Following are two representative comments about what they found most valuable:

- A dedicated block of time, with comfortable work space, Internet hook-up, editors and statistics experts, food, good company, networking opportunity.
- Time to focus on research and be in an environment where others are challenging me to excel. The idea of common struggle is very helpful.

Although many faculty achieved their Institute goals, most qualified their accomplishments with the admission that their original goals were overly ambitious, perhaps a symptom of wishful thinking. Still, most participants made real progress on a paper or other product, as these comments suggest:

- Yes, I completed a first draft of a paper and got critical feedback so I can complete it with confidence.
- I think my goal was to finish a draft which was a bit lofty. I did, however, get about 1/2 to 2/3 of a draft done and more importantly feel I will hold myself accountable for getting it done.

The latter comment is evidence of an attitudinal change that can lead to a behavioral change in writing habits.

In fact, we asked participants to tell us about their changes in attitudes. These sample comments point to positive shifts:

- Try to set aside writing time. Try to do one project at a time with a clear goal.

- Work ethic. I am dedicated to scheduling frequent, manageable writing blocks; less anxiety and a greater source of power in the review process.
- I can do it in small “chunks” of time; peer review is wonderful; I don’t feel so alone—others have similar writing issues.
- I can do it; I can learn to break the binge writer habit.

Participants also described their barriers to writing and being productive. Aside from the continual time demands of semesters, they cited stress and the uncertainty of the tenure and promotion process. Some said that they could not say “no” to others’ requests for their time, or as a few expressed it, be “ruthless” enough to write papers during the semester. A few others expressed the lack of joy in writing and the relative unimportance of creating new knowledge, compared to meeting more immediate professional obligations. Still, many faculty left the Institute viewing these barriers as more self-imposed than externally imposed, and most intended to develop better writing habits, including writing more frequently. Typical is this comment:

- This is my third [SWI], and I have found that overall my writing is increasing gradually. Coming to these [Institutes] at least once a year tends to help maintain my momentum. I’m aiming to become more and more productive.

Conclusion

Given the tremendous success of the SWIs, we intend to continue to offer them for the foreseeable future, maintaining the features that faculty value most: space, sustenance, and editorial, statistical, and coaching assistance. But we will also make changes based on faculty feedback gathered during the final day’s luncheon debriefing and from the written evaluations. In addition, we intend to conduct formal research on the Institutes’ long-term effects on faculty productivity, satisfaction with scholarly work, and faculty retention. Important questions remain. For example, what is the return on investment in these Institutes, in terms of faculty productivity, career advancement, and success in such professional milestones as retention, tenure, and promotion? How does the productivity

of faculty scholars who participate in these Institutes compare with faculty who do not participate? Last, why do female faculty participate in such high numbers, in comparison to male faculty?

To help sustain the writing momentum, we sponsor monthly "Faculty Writing Fridays" at the faculty center and writers' circles that meet in small groups to read and discuss work-in-progress. These writers' groups are common faculty support mechanisms (see Gere, 1987, for a review and Eodice & Cramer, 2001, for an example of a writing support group). Our writers' circles spin off from the Institutes among faculty who have already established a good chemistry. Although some of these groups endure across departments and disciplines, the press of business during regular semesters sometimes intrudes on even the best of well-laid plans.

Perhaps the best reason to continue these SWIs is that our faculty get important work done in a short time and leave the experience with an authentic sense of accomplishment. They also leave believing they can be more productive scholars and more skilled time managers. Last, and just as important, they leave having met new colleagues with whom they have shared stories about disasters and triumphs in their scholarly work and built a community of writers. In short, our faculty complete the SWI well satisfied and with a substantially improved outlook for their professional scholarly success. We believe this outlook is key for the successful integration of teaching and research activities.

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