Book Review


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Changing definitions and concepts of textual production have coincided with an ever-increasing pressure on faculty to publish. Extending support for faculty writing has consequently become perhaps more important than ever. Fortunately, *Working with Faculty Writers* (*WWFW*) provides an invaluable resource for those interested in developing initiatives to reach faculty members and invite serious talk about the role faculty writing plays in the university. It also represents an advance in the research on faculty productivity and writing. Consisting primarily of case studies on faculty writing support efforts, writing groups, and issues surrounding faculty writing, *WWFW* offers numerous examples of innovative programs and collaborations for faculty writing assistance. Writing center directors and staff will find the book worthwhile, for as Geller points out, "With the writing across the curriculum, writing to learn, writing in the disciplines, and communication across the curriculum movements, programmatic structures tended to coalesce around writing centers as sites for universal writing support" (9). Indeed, this book extends previous work done on the writing center's role in faculty writing support: for example, Ellen Schendel's *Writing Lab Newsletter* article "Retreating into the Center" is incorporated into a larger study on assessing faculty writing retreats. *WWFW* is thus a great tool kit for assisting writing center staff as they consider whether to start such a program, how to assess it, and ultimately how to connect faculty with the pedagogy and practices that work so well in our centers.

As Geller explains in the introduction, the purpose of "this collection is to make certain readers know that many in higher education have developed productive writing programs for all faculty (and future faculty)" (2). Geller, Eodice, and the other authors in the book have anticipated many questions about faculty writing support. Part 1, "Leadership and Locations," provides answers about who provides assistance for faculty writers and where such assistance would be housed (and, as Geller astutely points out, whose budget pays for it). Each of the chapters offers ways of envisioning and implementing the partnerships necessary to establish a successful faculty writing program, and what a viable site for these programs might look like. In Part 2, "Writing Groups/Retreats/Residencies," the authors explore the collaborative nature of faculty writing, looking at ways in which writing communities can be fostered: through facilitating and participating in faculty writing groups, cultivating faculty writing retreats, or other initiatives. Here readers will find examples of how these communities work in different institutional contexts and how to assess their effect. Finally, Part 3, "Issues and Authors," collects essays on the concerns that often circulate around writing in the university. The writers in this section grapple with several questions: Who are faculty writers, and what are the communities they operate in? What are the contexts surrounding the act of writing as faculty? What role does institution-type play in how faculty writing is enacted and assisted?

Although all of the chapters are potentially of interest to writing center staff, several are specific to the writing center. For example, in "The Idea of a Faculty Writing Center," the authors draw upon literacy studies to picture faculty writing centers as a locus for literacy communities and as a way to avoid re-inscribing remedial notions of writing center work. This chapter will no doubt help those seeking to make the writing center a place for faculty writing support without inverting the stigma that may come of such support. In "Assessing the Effects of Faculty and Staff Writing Retreats," Ellen Schendel, Susan Callaway, Violet Dutcher, and Claudine Griggs share the results.
of a study of the writing retreats they coordinated. Their assessments find these retreats “have immediate impact on participants, and a great potential for lasting impact” (160). The chapter offers models and issues to heed, including balancing the workload such retreats have for participants and organizers.

Two chapters in Part 2 address the role writing centers can play in facilitating successful faculty writing groups. Angela Clark-Oates and Lisa Cahill’s “Faculty Writing Groups” draws on Shirley Brice Heath’s concept of literacy events. They argue that writing centers provide a third space to help faculty members identify the codes and customs necessary to function as insiders in the literacy community of the academy and to interrogate and disrupt those customs. “Developing a Heuristic for Multi-Disciplinary Faculty Writing Groups” examines a writing group at a Research I university. Writing center practitioners will find this chapter encouraging as it highlights the reciprocal relationship that faculty writing groups can have with centers, emphasizing the peerness such partnerships can engender: centers can help faculty members consider both their writing and the way their students go about writing. Further, hosting these groups at the center can help make faculty aware of how their students might utilize the writing center.

Although the book draws from several different milieus and subfields, writing center practitioners will no doubt find many of the pedagogical underpinnings of the book familiar. The over-riding themes among the chapters are of collaboration and reflection, of pairing lived practice with theory and research. Geller, Eodice, and company have drawn together a collection of pieces that can act as a springboard for both practical and programmatic ends as well as further research. One striking feature of the book is how careful its authors are about claiming what has “worked” in their case studies. A common refrain echoing across chapters is the idea that what is presented is not universally applicable, that there is no blueprint or template that works across contexts. Rather, the authors contextualize their studies adequately enough for readers to imagine how those efforts might work in other environments. As the editors make clear, assessing local need is key to successful programs, and need will vary between (and often within) institutions. The pieces in the work are also realistic about many of the common obstacles to implementing and sustaining meaningful support, whether a lack of resources, faculty attrition, or the time required. Despite these cautions, the sheer amount of inventive work on faculty writing contained in the book is inspiring. At several points while reading the book, I found myself furiously scribbling down ideas to propose to colleagues at my institution as well as directors at other centers. Moreover these data-driven studies, all carefully assessed, can provide advocates at the local level with evidence of the viability and effectiveness of a variety of faculty writing support measures.

Given the diversity of the contributors’ backgrounds and sites of practice, one can hope that audiences unfamiliar with writing center pedagogy will be exposed to our work through its inclusion in the book. As one of Geller’s stated purposes for WWFW is to raise awareness about the variety of programs proliferating in higher education, it may help foster the sorts of collaborations described in its pages and encourage other stakeholders to seek out the writing center. As Eodice points out, “In turning toward and forming communities, faculty of all types can together consider some of the pressing questions of the coming years in regards to publication, intellectual property, knowledge repositories, academic labor, and the digital commons” (296-297). Working with Faculty Writers provides a wealth of resources, considerations, and research for fostering these sorts of communities and addressing these questions. Writing centers in a variety of situations will doubtless find it useful, whether to identify ways to plug in to existing faculty writing programs or to start such from whole cloth. Highly recommended.

http://writinglabnewsletter.org