

## A Model for Collaboration: Writing Centers and Scholarship Advising Offices

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In a 1991 article that became a cornerstone of writing center scholarship, Andrea Lunsford wrote about a shift in academia toward “viewing knowledge and reality as mediated by or constructed through language . . . in short, the product of collaboration” (p.4). Since that time, numerous articles have been written about collaboration as a way to improve institutional relationships in order to empower student success: with libraries (Datig), with writing programs (Schendel) and with students or teams of students who themselves are collaborating (Coffey). However, we have yet to see a publication about collaboration between a writing center and a scholarship advising program. Similarly, on the scholarship advising side, in an essay on “Scholarships as a Pathway to Government Service,” Gihan Fernando also describes an effective partnership between a scholarship advising office and the campus career center, and concludes: “The changing times make it all the more important for all parts of the academy to collaborate with each other closely to enrich and encourage our students’ aspirations to make change in the world.” The 2017 National Association of Fellowships Advisors Conference hosted one presentation that explored “different organizational models for connecting research and fellowships” (Wooten) and another that suggested bridging “the writing gap by placing writing instruction at the center of the advisement process” (DasBender), highlighting demand for expertise on different aspects of the application and related skills development. While a diverse repertoire of such expertise exists among campus staff, it is typically dispersed across distinct administrative units; therefore, richer potential may be realized through greater interaction and collaboration. Here we present a unique model of collaboration between our Scholarship Advisors and Writing Specialists that can be easily replicated at other campuses with little to no monetary expenditure.

The Center for Excellence in Writing & Communication (Writing Center) was established at the University of California, Irvine in 2012. At its inception, the Dean of Undergraduate Education decided that the Writing Center would also house the pre-existing Scholarship Opportunities Program (SOP), so that the Scholarship Advisors could partner with the Writing Specialists to enhance services to undergraduate students seeking to leverage their education into dynamic, enriching and worthwhile post-graduate experiences. This relationship fits Elizabeth Powers’ definition of “near collaboration,” in which participants “find that being literally close, spatially speaking, allows for organic, spontaneous collaborations to occur if one is open to the possibility” (p. 7). We agree that both of our units have benefitted from our proximity.

The SOP, even with limited budget and staffing, serves approximately 880 undergraduates, and ensures that all students who are interested in prestigious external merit scholarships receive comprehensive advising services, including application strategy, writing support, and nomination from the campus if applicable to the selected award. During Summer Session, our busiest season, undergraduate and recent alumni candidates for ten popular graduate fellowships are matched with staff Writing Specialists, who receive training from SOP staff regarding the various types of scholarships, deadlines and guidelines. The Writing Specialists

typically meet with each candidate for three consultations prior to campus endorsement interviews. Candidates receive personalized advice on brainstorming and developing effective essay drafts.

Evidence and testimonials suggest that students also see value in the SOP-Writing Center alliance as a means to enhance their post-graduation success. In an anonymous follow-up survey for the 2017 summer application process, 86% of respondents selected “in-person or Skype appointments with my Writing Specialist” as one of the most helpful personalized advising resources provided. In addition, 86% of respondents felt they gained personal benefits, 86% felt that they gained academic benefits, and 93% felt that they gained professional benefits from applying for graduate fellowships through SOP. In a post for SOP’s public Winners’ Blog, Fulbright Study/Research recipient and National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship winner John Naviaux ’12 wrote, “It may be intimidating to apply to multiple scholarships, but... you don’t have anything to lose by applying. The worst thing that can happen is that you write your strongest application yet. You can always use it to apply for other opportunities, including graduate school.” Similarly, Daniela Estrada ’17, Truman Scholar, wrote in her post: “The long [application] process gave me ample opportunity to revise my application. I have never revised any of my writing this much before! The SOP office was extremely helpful at guiding me through the application by giving me suggestions as to how I could make my application stronger. All the time and editing paid off because I became a finalist.” Whether nominee, finalist or scholarship recipient, students doing the exhaustive work and consulting frequently with faculty and professional staff from various departments discover their own strengths and emerge feeling intellectually enriched and personally empowered.

The SOP is eventually slated to move out of the Writing Center physical space, which will undoubtedly make our collaboration a continuous process of institutional self-discovery. But one thing is clear: all stakeholders desire to continue the partnership because both offices benefit greatly from the relationship. Writing Specialists’ work with the student drafts frees up time for Scholarship Advisors to assist faculty with submitting letters of recommendation and to facilitate the campus endorsement (nomination) and student interview process. Writing Specialists enjoy their work with scholarship candidates very much, encouraging the students’ creativity, helping them see links between their course work and their communication skills, empowering them to tell their stories in personal statements and aiding the development of focused, highly-specific statements of grant purpose. As we move forward with our partnership while housed in separate physical locations, we can serve as a model for other campuses who never had the opportunity to benefit from close proximity between their Writing Centers and fellowship advising offices.

The Writing Center and SOP collaboration draws on existing resources and does not require additional funding from the campus, increased demands on busy faculty, or staff overtime. This practice may be replicable at other college and university fellowship advising offices operating under similar resource constraints. We recommend the following steps:

1. Writing Center and Scholarship administrators meet to discuss the partnership, timetable and minimum number of consultations expected for each scholarship candidate.
2. Scholarship Advisors provide training to Writing Specialists on the awards that they will support, including writing prompts and strategic advice.
3. Scholarship Advisors assign candidates to Writing Specialists and inform the candidates of how to book consultations.
4. Writing Specialists share their consultation notes with Scholarship Advisors to ensure advice is coordinated throughout the application process.

One complication in adopting our model may be experienced by other universities who do not have as many professional writing specialists as we have (four full-time and two part-time). We would like to conclude by suggesting possible ways that other institutions could flex our model to adapt it to their particular configuration, inviting participation from faculty scholarship winners, or even graduate and undergraduate students with relevant experience and training:

- Writing Specialists devote or prioritize summer consultations to scholarship applicants.
- Faculty or previous award recipients/finalists serve as mentors to scholarship applicants.
- Advanced undergraduate writing tutors or graduate student tutors provide consultations to scholarship applicants.

Our process of cultivating our sense of academic community was developed through near collaboration, which allowed for multiple conversations sparking numerous ideas to fine tune the details. Other post-secondary institutions can adopt and adapt our method, engaging in what Powers terms “far collaboration” and “collaborative labor,” saving the time and expense of a physical move.

## Works Cited

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How can educators model true collaboration and partnering to our students? Here are three extended categories focused on just that: Collegial Collaboration. Writing the Right: Our students are expected to write, and rightly so. They are also expected to digitally publish and share their work (although many classrooms are, unfortunately, not quite there yet). This is another great opportunity to model 21st-century skills. As a teacher, it's worth looking for ways to show students that sharing their writing can inspire others, and help in the practice of reflective thinking and getting feedback from others. You can even write collaboratively with a colleague on a blog, a feature story or a book. Great resources for educators to start blogging are WordPress, Blogger, and Weebly. The Academic Advising office was founded in 2011 as one of Abu Dhabi University's strategic initiatives to support students in achieving their potential and academic goals. The mission of Abu Dhabi University Academic Advising Office is to guide and support students during their academic journey to ensure they succeed in achieving their goals and career plans. The Writing Center supports writing for undergraduate and graduate students across the university by providing one-on-one workshops and consultations. The center aims to tailor supplemental writing instruction to match each individual, addressing different learning abilities and writing voices. The center also offers feedback and strategies that will support students in different stages of writing. 40+ Sample Collaboration Letters What Is a Collaboration Letter? Why Collaboration Is Key in Business Survival Five Iconic Business Collaborations to Inspire You How Do You Write a Collaboration Letter? 40+ Sample Collaboration Letters. Letter of Collaboration. When you want to partner with an individual, a company, or an institution on a shared project, collaboration letters help express your intentions clearly enough to deliver your message. The letter allows you to communicate your plans and open doors for discussions in hopes of bringing your business to the next level. When done right, it can help you win over a partnership for what could be the best business move for your company. Why Collaboration Is Key in Business Survival.