



The First-Year Writing Program

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Our award-winning First-Year Writing (FYW) program in WRAC is supported by a distinctively collaborative group of teachers highly invested in pedagogy and in their own and students' learning.

FYW plays an important role in facilitating students' transition to MSU, and for creating pathways for student success. WRAC houses a deeply invested community of teachers committed to this mission.

Our FYW program is distinctive for its reflective storytelling curriculum. Professional development programming for our teachers aligns with the values of our FYW classes, where students learn in relation to their own experiences and ideas, and are invited to articulate their own learning (via reflection and peer review), rather than to demonstrate mastery of content. Aligning with program values,, we provide our instructors with multiple opportunities (both formal and informal) to reflect with others on the many challenges and opportunities experienced in their teaching.. Our robust professional development program highlights our strong investment in teachers:: their growth, development, and well-being.

We are committed to a well-supported community of teacher-scholars as an important condition for student success. This commitment is consonant with the Boyer 2030 Commission Report in its recommendation that departments develop a collective, rather than just individual, approach to teaching excellence. First-Year Writing at MSU is an innovative program that values "departmental (rather than individual faculty) responsibility for the curriculum of courses, quality of teaching, and design of assessments" ("The Equity/Excellence Imperative: a 2030 Blueprint for Undergraduate Education at U.S. Research Universities," p. 28)

To this end, we work to create programming that surfaces, collects, and shares the contributions of our teachers. We leverage the diverse experiences and ideas teachers bring to the common project of enabling and supporting student learning. Some features of our programming for teacher learning and support are:

- **August Orientation and Onboarding:** The FYW program provides a robust eight-day orientation for new teachers (TAs and faculty) at the start of each academic year. This orientation experience is not only an introduction to the curriculum and goals of FYW classes, but also a seminar in best ideas and practices in teaching and learning, introducing new instructors to our shared curriculum and reflective, story-telling emphases and offering multiple opportunities for teaching practice and community building. We also introduce teachers to many campus student support resources. In addition, new teachers have the opportunity to meet and make connections with experienced teachers, so that they begin to see their colleagues as collaborators in a common project.

- **Mentoring Groups for New Faculty and TAs:** Led by members of our FYW administrative team, weekly mentoring groups are occasions for first-year writing instructors to share pedagogical experiences, showcase innovations in their teaching practice, troubleshoot classroom scenarios, and collaboratively problem-solve.
- **Teaching Circles:** Both new and experienced instructors meet in small groups bi-weekly to share pedagogical challenges and approaches, often with reference to specific topics of interest (e.g., making a course more accessible, leveraging reflective writing, developing DEI practices, re-thinking peer review).
- **Friday Workshop Series:** Open to all writing instructors, workshops are often the site of lively discussion focused around a range of pedagogical questions. Sometimes the workshops incorporate expertise outside the program (for instance, a counselor in the Employee Assistance Program facilitated a workshop on “how to be well when your students may not be”); at other times, the workshops are facilitated by FYW instructors (for example, the workshop on “adjusting to hybrid teaching” offered by a group of FYW faculty who looked at this teaching modality as both a research issue and pedagogical opportunity).
- **First-Year Writing Program Spring Meeting:** Held at the end of the academic year, this event provides space for all instructors to come together once again, to reflect on the academic year, and to set goals for their future.

Although the programmatic goals for these professional development opportunities are primarily pedagogical, these shared spaces also generate larger research projects and publication opportunities. Through our programming, we provide ongoing support of both graduate instructors and faculty to help develop them as teacher–scholars. In our programming of opportunities for teachers to learn with and from their peers and their colleagues what it means and is to teach First-Year Writing at Michigan State University, we strive to create a collaborative community of teacher–scholars highly invested in the work they do and in supporting first-year students.

For more information, please see wrac.msu.edu or contact Professor Julie Lindquist (lindqu11@msu.edu), Director of the First-Year Writing Program in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and Cultures.