As Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) coordinator, I don't have to do much to sell faculty writing groups. The faculty who join these groups know what’s in it for them as scholars: the combination of useful peer feedback and accountability to the group means having quality manuscripts to submit for publication.

But what does being in a faculty writing group have to do with teaching? I recently posed this question to a group of UND faculty who have participated in various writing groups on campus. Chris Atkinson (Geography), Mary Baker (Teaching and Learning), Chris Gjesfjeld (Social Work), Sarah Mosher (Languages), and Clement Tang (Mechanical Engineering) offered their responses at an On Teaching lunch seminar in November. These faculty noted several connections between their experiences in writing groups and their teaching.

**Getting clear**

Because many faculty writing groups are interdisciplinary, participants find themselves answering questions about jargon or about how their research connects to the big questions in their fields. Often, articulating these explanations for colleagues in very different disciplines helps a faculty writer improve a manuscript. UND faculty in writing groups have also found that this same need to phrase ideas clearly helps them refine the ways they present ideas to their students during lectures. It can also help faculty be more clear and precise when stating expectations for student assignments.

**Becoming writing process experts**

Talking to other faculty about how they generate, draft, revise, and edit their work helps teachers explicitly discuss the writing process with students. Writing teachers and researchers define “writing process” as all of the activities a writer does to create a finished piece. It includes scribbling ideas on napkins, pounding out rough drafts, bouncing ideas off colleagues, re-reading, re-thinking, and tinkering with sentences. These activities can happen in any order and often overlap. As faculty in writing groups become more and more aware of their own writing processes, they can guide students through productive writing process strategies. They can also build these process strategies into writing assignments.

**Bringing grad students into the publishing world**

Inviting graduate students to join faculty writing groups offers a valuable learning experience to the students, who are just beginning to participate in a community of publishing scholars. The conversations in the faculty writing group can demystify the publication process as well as model the rigorous thinking and creativity that goes into producing published work.
Seeing the writing of colleagues—and of students—in a new way
Being in a writing group means reading colleagues’ work in many different stages—from a rough draft to a piece that’s nearly ready to be published. If the group is interdisciplinary, it also means reading outside one’s content-knowledge comfort zone. Sometimes, UND writing group participants have found they just can’t understand some portion of their colleague’s writing. Whether that’s due to a lack of insider knowledge or the early stage of a draft, group members still know that their colleagues are intelligent and dedicated scholars. This recognition can help an instructor look at student writing differently, seeing students, too, as smart people working through complicated ideas in writing.

Remembering what it’s like to be a student
Writing group participants have deadlines that hold them accountable to the group. While group members often say this is one of the key benefits of being in the group, it doesn’t mean they never wish they had a few more days to work on a draft. This reminder can help faculty empathize with students who ask for extensions (though it doesn’t necessarily mean giving extensions—for a faculty writing group to work, everyone has to stick to the deadlines). Also, being in a group means getting feedback. While the supportive atmosphere of the writing group experience makes it very different from submitting work for a grade, thinking about how it feels to wait for and then see feedback helps faculty reflect on their practices of giving feedback to students.

Improving peer response in the classroom
Being part of a peer writing group gives faculty new ideas for how to use peer response groups in their classes. For example, a common part of the faculty writing group process is for the writer to send a cover letter or talk to the group about the project and what he or she needs from the group. This step is often skipped in student peer response activities. However, student writers can benefit from reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of their own draft before getting peer feedback, and their peer responders can benefit from the focus provided by the writer’s questions.

In faculty writing group conversations, it has become clear that talking about writing is incredibly helpful for both faculty and student writers. Too often, writing is a lonely task. Writing groups provide the community that helps writers accomplish their goals.

If you’d like to join a faculty writing group, contact me at kathleen.vacek@und.edu or 701-777-6381.

Writing Center Consultant Ekart is Student Employee of the Year

UND’s Student Employee of the Year for 2013 is Kayla Ekart. Kayla works as a writing consultant in the Apartment Community Center (ACC) and in the Writing Center. In this role, she assists student writers at any stage of the writing process, on topics from any discipline, through face-to-face sessions. Since starting her position in the fall, Kayla has significantly impacted the Apartment Community and has been a positive force in the Writing Center. This fall, the number of writing conferences at the ACC more than doubled over last fall, and the number of students participating increased by 29%.

The Student Employee of the Year (SEOTY) Recognition Program gives supervisors the chance to nominate their outstanding student employees whom they feel warrant recognition for their on the job performance. Supervisors nominate student employees that portray reliability, quality of work, initiative, professionalism, and uniqueness of contribution while on the job. Kayla was nominated for the award by her supervisors Troy Noeldner (Housing) and Kathleen Vacek (University Writing Program), and she was selected by the Student Employee of the Year Committee.

Kayla received her BA in Classical Archaeology from the University of Michigan and her MA in Education: Second Languages and Culture from the University of Minnesota. She is currently a senior at UND working on her second BA in ClassicalLanguages with the aim of getting teaching licensure in North Dakota as well as Minnesota.
SUMMER PROJECTS

Congratulations to the following faculty members who have been awarded Summer Instructional Development Projects (SIDPs) to work on course development projects over the next few months:

Justin Berg, Assistant Professor, Sociology
“Teaching Sociological Statistics and Advancing Student Learning”

Eric Burin, Professor, History
“Practice What You Preach: Implementing Pedagogical Best Practices in a Graduate Seminar on Teaching History”

Travis Desell, Assistant Professor, Computer Science
“Developing a Computer Science Capstone Course: Investigating and Fostering the Integration of Multi-Disciplinary Research and Industry Partnership”

Julia Ernst, Assistant Professor, Law
“Flipping the Constitutional Law Classroom: Engaging First Year Law Students in Active Learning”

James Grijalva, Professor, Law
“Flipping Property Law: Re-envisioning Legal Education and the Law School Classroom”

Tanis Hastmann, Assistant Professor, Physical Education Exercise Science and Wellness
“Redevelopment of Introduction to Public Health using a Problem-Based Learning Approach”

Michele Iiams, Associate Professor, Mathematics
“Integrating Math 400 & T&L 486: Creating a Cohesive Experience for Mathematics Teacher Candidates”

Lynda Kenney, Assistant Professor, Technology
“Flipped Learning: Turning the Traditional Classroom on Its Head”

Michael Niedzielski, Assistant Professor, Geography
“Essential Skills in GIScience: A hands-on approach to Python and Geodatabases”

Lori Robison, Associate Professor, English
“Revising Composition II”

Tom Stokke, Assistant Professor, Computer Science
“Redesigning an Introductory Computer Science Course for a SCALE-UP Lab”

Doris Wang, Assistant Clinical Professor, Nutrition and Dietetics
“Active Classroom Learning for Community Nutrition”

ACTIVE LEARNING IN LARGE CLASSES MAY WORKSHOP

Save the Date: May 29-30, from 9-4

OID will offer a two day Active Learning in Large Classes Workshop this summer, on Wednesday and Thursday, May 29th and 30th. This workshop will provide support for faculty teaching in the SCALE-UP classroom next year and will also serve faculty who teach large enrollment courses anywhere on campus, and want to incorporate more active and collaborative learning. The workshop will be conducted by Dr. Mark Decker (University of Minnesota) and will take place in the SCALE-UP classroom (O’Kelly 61).

If you would like to participate in the workshop, please contact Anne Kelsch at anne.kelsch@und.edu or 7-4233.
Upcoming On Teaching Lunch Seminar

Active Learning in Large Classes (Lessons from SCALE-UP)
Wednesday, April 10, 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM (register by Monday, April 8 at noon)

On Teaching Lunch Seminars are informal lunch-time discussions on teaching-related topics of interest to faculty in all disciplines. All sessions take place in the Badlands Room.

To register and reserve a lunch, please fill out the online registration form on the OID webpage (oid.und.edu).

UPCOMING DEADLINES
May 1       FIDC Grant Monthly Deadline (noon)
            should include all requests between May 4-Aug. 31

May 29-30   Active Learning in Large Classes Workshop

On Teaching is published six times a year as a service to UND faculty.
OID Director: Anne Kelsch. WAC Coordinator and newsletter editor: Kathleen Vacek.
OID/WAC Staff: Jeanne Boppre & Jana Lagro.