

IMPLEMENTATION AND OUTCOMES OF A FACULTY-BASED, PEER REVIEW MANUSCRIPT WRITING WORKSHOP



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The publication of scholarly work and research findings is an important expectation for nursing faculty; however, academic writing is often neglected, leaving dissemination through manuscript writing an area of concern for the nursing profession. Writing initiatives have been utilized to promote scholarly dissemination in schools of nursing, but those described in the literature have been primarily non-United States based and student focused. This article describes a faculty-based manuscript writing workshop, assesses participants' impressions, and describes its impact on scholarly output. The workshop is a collaborative learning process utilizing peer review to improve manuscript quality and model behaviors for improving writing and peer-reviewing skills. Seventeen workshop participants including three predoctoral students, 6 postdoctoral fellows, and 8 faculty members completed an anonymous workshop survey (81% response rate). All but 1 of 17 manuscripts reviewed in the workshop are published, accepted, or in the review process. All participants indicated that the workshop was a valuable use of time and would recommend it to colleagues. The greatest reported workshop benefit was its function as an impetus to complete and submit manuscripts. We recommend the manuscript writing workshop model for other schools of nursing seeking ways to expand their scholarly output and create accountability for dissemination through manuscript writing. (Index words: Writing workshop; Manuscripts; Peer review; Scholarly dissemination) *J Prof Nurs* 32:262–270, 2016. © 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

DISSEMINATION OF NEW knowledge is critical to advancing the field of nursing, and the publication of scholarly work and research findings in the professional literature is an important expectation for nursing faculty (Dowling, Savrin, & Graham, 2013; Morton, 2013; Ness, Duffy, McCallum, & Price, 2014; Wilson, Sharrad, Rasmussen, & Kernick, 2013). Publication is not only a common measure of productivity for promotion and tenure review (Morton, 2013; Rickard et al., 2009; Tschannen et al., 2014), but it can also be argued that it is a professional obligation. For many nursing faculty members, busy, overbooked, and overburdened schedules make the task of scientific writing an easy target for

procrastination. In addition, some faculty members have inadequate scholarly writing skills and/or are not in the habit of writing on a regular basis as part of their professional time. Others may have skills for term paper writing from their past education but have no knowledge of how to write for a professional journal. This makes academic writing a painful task for many and one that may be repeatedly pushed forward in schedules, sometimes to the point of being completely neglected. This, coupled with a lack of accountability, leaves the act of scholarly dissemination through manuscript writing an area of concern for nursing scholars, researchers, and leaders.

Studies have detailed the facilitators and barriers to dissemination and publication among nursing faculty (Keen, 2007; Regan & Pietrobon, 2010; Shatzer et al., 2010; Wilson et al., 2013). Initiatives such as writing groups, workshops, centers, and programs have become more common in schools of nursing over the past decade but are typically imbedded in the educational curriculum targeted at nursing students (Gazza & Hunker, 2012; Hunker, Gazza, & Shellenbarger, 2014; Latham & Ahern, 2013; Shirey, 2013). Hence, schools of nursing seeking to expand their scholarly output may search in vain for

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initiatives to support and promote the act of writing among their faculty. While there is some evidence that writing initiatives have been successfully implemented at the faculty level in general academia, medical schools, and hospitals (Grzybowski et al., 2003; Lee & Boud, 2003; Shatzer et al., 2010; Steinert, McLeod, Liben, & Snell, 2008), few reports have focused specifically on faculty at schools of nursing. Those that have were multiple-day retreats (Jackson, 2009), writing courses coupled with monthly support groups (Rickard et al., 2009), or group writing activities that divided the workload and resulted in joint authorship of a publishable end product (Ness et al., 2014). Others consisted only of clinical faculty (Stone, Levett-Jones, Harris, & Sinclair, 2010) or included of a broad range of staff, students, and faculty (Wilson et al., 2013). Of particular note, all were based at schools of nursing outside the United States. Therefore, little is known about the impact of writing workshops in the United States focused on nursing faculty to enhance writing attitudes and skills, improve the quality of an already prepared manuscript, and increase publication success rates.

In June of 2013, the Office of Scholarship and Research Development (OSR) at Columbia University School of Nursing (CUSON) launched its first manuscript writing workshop specifically targeted to all levels of teaching, clinical, and research faculty members, research scientists, and postdoctoral fellows and was subsequently opened to doctoral students after several trial sessions. The fifth workshop was completed in the spring of 2015. The workshop is based on peer review and constructive comments in a collaborative, supportive environment in a spirit of mutual respect and desire to elevate each other to succeed. Because the manuscript writing workshop may be a model useful for other schools of nursing focused on expanding their faculties' scholarly dissemination, the purpose of this article is to (a) describe the faculty-based manuscript writing workshop philosophy, process, and benefits to participants; (b) assess participants' impressions of their experience in the workshop, its usefulness and effectiveness, and its impact on their writing and peer-reviewing abilities; and (c) describe the impact of the workshop on subsequent scholarly output and publication success rates.

Methods

Underlying Philosophy and Conceptual Underpinnings

The manuscript writing workshop is based upon several fundamental beliefs about the writing process, regardless of the setting or type of writing. These include but are not limited to the fact that good writers are “made, not born,” that everyone can improve their writing skills with practice just like any other skill and regardless of their current level of ability, and that writing is a public, communal act, not a solitary, isolated one. The writing workshop model, established in the literature in the late 1970s (Bean, 1979; Bickford, 2015; Murray, 1979), is grounded in the now common, widely implemented practice of peer review and

evaluation in college-level composition classes (Armstrong & Paulson, 2008; Bickford, 2015; Dartmouth Institute for Writing and Rhetoric, 2015; Engbers, 2009; Gayle Morris Sweetland Center for Writing at the University of Michigan). The design and structure of CUSON's manuscript writing workshop emerged from several key philosophies. First, the workshop is a collaborative learning process (Bruffee, 1984) conducted in a positive, supportive, and nurturing environment, built on mutual respect and a desire to see each other improve and succeed as writers. The structure is based on reviewing a piece of writing as a whole, seeing “the big picture,” and focusing on clarity, organization, meaning, understanding, and flow; it is not an editing service focused on word-level changes and identifying misspellings and grammatical errors. It teaches writers the skill of being able to separate themselves from their own writing and serve as an external reader to more effectively revise their own writing. It is often easier to see flaws in someone else's writing rather than one's own, and being able to practice this improves an individual's ability to see flaws in their own writing. To allow the writer to maintain ownership, peer reviews in the workshop consist of nondirective comments rather than directive “red line” changes. Finally, responding to writing by “asking questions” of the writer to elicit more information is an effective method of providing suggestions for improvement while promoting writer ownership (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982; Dartmouth Institute for Writing and Rhetoric, 2014; Reynolds & Russell, 2008). Asking questions as a way to introduce ideas for revision makes the writer more amenable to considering the feedback. Instead of commenting “I don't understand this” or “You need to describe this better,” participants are encouraged to state, “Can you explain this in more detail?” “Can you show me more of how this process works?” or “Can you give a specific example of when this would occur?” These philosophies are shared with participants as part of the orientation session and in materials they are assigned to read prior to joining a workshop.

Participants

Targeting a feasible, maximum 1-hour time frame per workshop, a minimum of four and maximum of seven individuals participate in each session, inclusive of three or four faculty members, two or three postdoctoral fellows, and no more than two predoctoral students. For students to be eligible, they must be working closely with a faculty member outside the workshop who is a senior author. Each workshop participant must have a first-authored manuscript that they consider nearly ready to submit to a peer-reviewed journal by the time it is “workshopped,” that is, reviewed and discussed by all participants. Manuscripts must be scholarly in nature, but the workshop is not limited to the dissemination of research-based articles and encourages publications from clinically and education-focused faculty. All members are equal learners and participants in the peer-review process regardless of their position within the school. Repeat participants are allowed, but new participants are given priority. A variety of

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