

## What are the overarching aims of the PWSA [**Peer Writing & Speaking Associate**] experience?

- To build **trust** and **rapport** with—and to be a **liaison** between—the instructor and students in a single First Year Seminar.
- To assist students transitioning into the Bates academic experience as **peer educators** (a fancy word for “tutors”) engaged in **peer-led learning** and guided by Writing@Bates professional staff, writing studies research, and a partner-instructor’s insights and expectations.
- To take **responsibility** for and develop ways to **strengthen** their—and their peers’—critical thinking, writing, speaking and problem-solving skills, collaborative abilities, learning and studying strategies, communicative capabilities, self-reflection and peer-assessment techniques.
- To focus on the work of **being** a student **with** other students while offering an attainable **model for** those students.

## Why have a PWSA supporting an FYS?

Because **PWSAs** and **students** benefit! Students who participate in peer-led learning experience:

- reduced anxiety associated with their transition into higher education;
- a greater sense of belonging and improved academic confidence;
- deeper social integration with campus networks;
- greater ownership of their learning;
- greater engagement (and through that, often achieve higher grades);
- a greater academic locus of control; and
- high levels of personal and professional skills, which enhances their performance and future career prospects.<sup>1</sup>

## Who are PWSAs?

PWSAs are often nominated by faculty, though many simply apply on their own and request to work with certain faculty because they have a passion for peer education and supporting first year students. Some are certified Writing Fellows who have successfully completed our short term course, *EDU s19: The Theory and Practice of Writing and Tutoring*. No matter

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<sup>1</sup> [Keenan, Chris, “Mapping Student-Led Peer Learning in the UK” \(2014\)](#)

how they come to us, we require a letter of interest, resume, transcript, writing sample, faculty recommendation, and an interview before giving them an offer and matching them with an instructor. Generally, PWSAs must care deeply about supporting other students, have shown an interest in such work (through internships, jobs, major, etc.), and be able to model effective learning strategies. We seek out PWSAs who are:

- **Empathetic:** They are relatable, kind, and compassionate.
- **Resilient:** They may have had to work hard at their writing/speaking skills but attended to that work thoughtfully, and have shown growth because of it.
- **Learners:** They are willing to own their learner status and are happy to share their stories of failure and growth with others.
- **Rhetorically Savvy:** They often exhibit strong writing and/or speaking skills and are particularly adept at taking and offering constructive feedback.
- **Liaisons:** They are able to communicate instructor expectations to students and to communicate student struggles back to instructors.
- **Collaborative:** They are liked by—and comfortable working with—both students *and* instructors.

### **Generally, what do PWSAs do?**

A PWSA's relationship with students begins with a relationship of [respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility](#)<sup>2</sup> with an instructor. Though a PWSA's first priority is students, they need information and guidance from a partner-instructor. Instructors and PWSAs should aim to meet and communicate early in—and throughout—a semester. Ideally, a PWSA will

- know when writing and speaking assignments are due and the instructor's expectations for those assignments.
- schedule their support of students around important due dates for writing and speaking assignments in the course.
- offer a student perspective of course materials to an instructor.
- offer one-on-one and/or small group tutoring sessions with every student in an FYS.
- notice and report FYS students' general patterns of success and struggle in their writing and speaking assignments.
- design and lead at least one workshop, presentation, or group session in support of the instructor's writing or speaking goals for the course.

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<sup>2</sup> From [Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching: A Guide for Faculty](#), Alison Cook-Sather, Catherine Bovill, & Peter Felten (2014)

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**Specifically, what can PWSAs and instructors do *together*?**

In order to enjoy and grow in a professional PWSA-instructor partnership and provide the most effective support for FYS students, meet with each other at least bi-weekly in face-to-face meetings to discuss the following:

**COURSE GOALS:** What are the course goals? Share the syllabus. Include the PWSA's name and contact information in the syllabus and [add them to your class site](#).

**BOUNDARIES:** What kinds of feedback (if any) does the instructor want from the PWSA on their syllabus, course materials, and assignments? How can the partnership unfold in a way that both are putting something meaningful into it and getting something meaningful out of it? Are both being responsible to the students?<sup>3</sup>

**ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING:** What are the writing and speaking assignments for the course and how do they help students work towards the course goals? Discuss [these important characteristics of an effective assignment prompt](#) and/or grading expectations (i.e. a rubric, like the [FYS Writing Values Rubric](#)).

**DUE DATES & TUTORING SESSIONS:** What are the due dates for assignments? Work backwards from those dates to determine what points in the semester (and how) the PWSA should schedule tutoring appointments. PWSAs can lead one-on-one and/or small group sessions. Assure these are accessible hours for the students and they know how to sign up.

**STUDENTS' PROCESSES:** At what point in the writing or planning process will students be asked to meet with the PWSA? You might vary it: first assignment, students meet with the PWSA for prewriting/brainstorming; second assignment, students bring a first draft (with or without instructor feedback) for a chance at revision; third session, students bring or practice a near-final draft or presentation.

**REQUIREMENTS:** Will sessions with PWSAs be required or optional? Determine how attendance and feedback will be reported back to the instructor. Keep in mind that PWSAs should not be responsible for evaluating or grading student work. Make the system explicit to students so it is fair, equitable, and accessible to everyone.

**WORKSHOPS:** When, where, and about what might a PWSA run a workshop or presentation for the whole class? The PWSA will work with a Writing@Bates professional staff member and Student Manager to design this; they can be inside or outside of class. Base the presentation on something the PWSA really enjoys and does well! Some ideas:

- Understanding an Assignment Prompt
- Peer Review, or Getting and Giving Feedback
- Researching and/or Taking Notes (or other basic study skills)
- Citing and Integrating Sources
- Giving Presentations

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<sup>3</sup> Find more great practical suggestions like these from [Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching: A Guide for Faculty](#), (Chapter 7) Alison Cook-Sather, Catherine Bovill, and Peter Felten.

## What should a PWSA's work schedule look like?

A PWSA is allotted **50 hours** of paid work time in one semester. Instructors, please be mindful of PWSAs' schedules though it is ultimately a PWSA's responsibility to stay within the allotted 50 hours and to report and reflect on their work to Writing@Bates. The chart below offers a suggested outline of how those 50 hours may be spent in one semester.

Type of Support	Hours	Description
Initial ARC Trainings in September	~10 hours	One (1) half-day and one (1) full-day (Sept. 2 & 3) training; led by Writing@Bates professional staff
1-hour ARC Trainings During the Semester	~8 hours	Eight (8), one-hour trainings held weekly throughout the semester; led by Writing@Bates professional staff & the PWSA Student Manager
Tutoring Sessions (one-on-one, or small group)	~20 to ~25 hours	PWSAs can <b>meet</b> with each student in the FYS for up to three (3) 30-minute tutoring sessions, for small group sessions, or for a combination of both (recommended); sessions should be strategically placed throughout the semester; PWSAs can set up <b>appointment</b> slots that students sign up for (using GoogleCal, a spreadsheet, or a sign-up sheet in class); holding office hours is another, though less efficient option; faculty can either <b>require</b> (i.e. count towards grade) or <b>recommend</b> their FYS students meet with the PWSA for these sessions.
Group Presentation or Workshop	~1 hour	We recommend PWSAs work with their partner-instructor to determine a topic, time, and location for the PWSA to facilitate one (1) in-class or outside-of-class presentation or workshop with all students. The professional staff of Writing@Bates assists PWSAs in developing these workshops.
Meetings with Partner-Instructor	~2 to 3 hours  (~4 to 6 mtgs)	We recommend that PWSAs meet with their partner-instructor about every other week regarding the best use of their paid work time (i.e. to intentionally schedule and check in on all of the above); aim for ~30 mins a meeting.
Field Reports to Staff Supervisor	~3 hours  (~20 mins each)	PWSAs are required to submit eight (8) brief <b>Field Reports</b> (online) that the Writing@Bates professional staff uses for program assessment and support; due on various Fridays throughout the semester.
Preparation/At-Home Work	~3 to 5 hours	PWSAs may use this extra solo time for preparing workshops or working on their ARC e-portfolios.

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### What does a PWSA's professional development look like?

All ARC trainings are led by the professional staff of Writing@Bates and [ARC Student Managers](#). You can find our full bios [here](#), or come see us on the 2nd floor of Coram!

- Dr. Dan Sanford, Director ([dsanford@bates.edu](mailto:dsanford@bates.edu))
- Dr. Bridget Fullerton, Assistant Director, FYS Instructor & PWSA Coordinator ([bfullert@bates.edu](mailto:bfullert@bates.edu))
- Dr. Stephanie Wade, Assistant Director, FYS Instructor ([swade@bates.edu](mailto:swade@bates.edu))
- Eric Dyer, Student Support Coordinator ([edyer@bates.edu](mailto:edyer@bates.edu))

PWSAs are hired and trained under the umbrella of ARC, or Bates' [Academic Resource Commons](#), with the 70+ other peer educators who work for ARC. Several PWSAs are certified **Writing Fellows** which means they completed our short term course, *EDU s19: The Theory and Practice of Writing and Tutoring*. Other PWSAs simply have a few years of experience working in ARC; some are brand new. By the end of a semester, however, *all* PWSAs will have some training in and/or exposure to the following topics:

- Schemas, Working Memory, and Long-Term Memory
- The Zone of Proximal Development
- Active Learning
- Collaborative Learning
- Critical Thinking
- The Affective Domain
- Active and Empathetic Listening
- Learning Strategies (i.e. note-taking, participating in class, time management, etc.)
- Professionalism Towards Writers, Tutors, and Instructors
- Leading a Tutoring Session (getting started, setting an agenda, feedback, wrapping up)
- Conducting Individual vs. Group Appointments vs. Drop-in Labs
- Tutoring Strategies for Different Types of Writing Assignments
- Tutoring Strategies for Speaking, or Public Presentations
- Tutoring the Writing Process (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing)
- Working With Different Types of Writers
- Equity, Allyship, and Tutoring Across Difference
- Tutoring Multilingual Writers

During their professional development, PWSAs often publicly share experiences with and learn from each other, Writing@Bates staff, and the other tutors who work for ARC. Private **reflections** and **field reports** are an essential part of their training and help us understand their struggles and successes. This professionalization work, in addition to their actual tutoring, often culminates in a [CRLA national certification](#) and the creation of an ARC **e-portfolio**, which includes a **Tutoring Philosophy and Project**. The Writing@Bates professional staff guides ARC peer educators through this often multiyear endeavor.

### What a PWSA is NOT.

It might be helpful to hear that a PWSA isn't a TA; they don't grade, "fix up", or line-by-line edit papers.<sup>4</sup> PWSAs are [course-embedded](#) writing and speaking tutors who meet and talk face-to-face with first year students about their assignments and offer tips and tricks for developing their writing and speaking muscles to meet the expectations of the FYS instructor *and* for writing and speaking in their other courses. PWSAs can offer generalities to an instructor regarding students' overarching struggles and concerns, but should talk about a *specific* student to an instructor *only with that student's permission*.

### Final Thoughts

Learning to write at the college level is complicated and difficult; setbacks and regressions are normal and *constant*. A large part of an FYS instructor's work is to explicitly teach students how to access, adapt, and extend hard lessons about writing and learning to new situations (i.e. [teaching for transfer](#)). PWSAs and instructors can work together to help students do this and to understand failure as part of learning as they talk and think aloud with each other about mutual areas of struggle and link what they are learning in your FYS to their past, present, and future educational experiences. The PWSA-instructor partnership uses a long-haul, takes-a-village kind of approach to helping first-year students

- transition from high school to college-level academics,
- become better writers and speakers (vs. improve their writing/speaking assignment or get an A on a paper), and most importantly,
- **set a foundation for self-directed learning by normalizing the crucial skill of asking for help and seeking out support.**

### Helpful Resources

- [The P.A.G.E. Guidelines for Assignment Design](#)
- [The Bates FYS Writing Values Rubric](#)
- [The Norton Field Guide to Writing \(4E\)](#), Richard Bullock & Francine Weiberg
- [Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching: A Guide for Faculty](#), Alison Cook-Sather, Catherine Bovill, & Peter Felten; [Chp.1](#)
- [Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom](#), John C. Bean
- [The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors](#), Leigh Ryan & Lisa Zimmerelli; [Chp. 5](#)
- [The St. Martin's Sourcebook for Writing Tutors](#), Christina Murphy & Steve Sherwood; [Chp. 1](#)
- [The Practical Tutor](#) by Emily Meyer and Louise Z. Smith
- [Students Helping Students](#) by Fred Newton and Steven Ender
- [The Peer Review Journal](#) (free; online)

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<sup>4</sup> PWSAs should also **not** be asked to have anything to do with grading a paper or speech; they should **not** be asked to purchase course texts or to audit the course they are supporting; they also should **not** be asked to work more than the allotted 50 hours, nor teach a class as a substitute for the instructor. Thank you!