



A Step-by-Step Guide for Starting a Writers@Work Series at Your Campus:

from Writers@Work: An Alumni Writers-in-Residence Series, State University of New York at Fredonia

1. **Identify potential stakeholders in writing on your campus.** Think broadly about academic disciplines since all professions—and careers—value strong written communication skills. Think equally broadly about the range of administrative offices that engage with alumni, with current and prospective students, and with students’ academic and professional success.

Think beyond the box: For example, Residence Life often requires resident assistants to plan events for their buildings. Would they be interested in having alumni writers speak to their residents about how to start building their professional futures while they are still in school?

2. **Interview as many of these stakeholders as possible to learn what they believe is most important to prepare students to write professionally and to create awareness of career pathways.** Ask stakeholders what they think your campus’s greatest strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities with regard to writing are. Ask as well how an alumni writers-in-residence series could fit with the goals of their departments, offices, and divisions. Find out whom they would recommend inviting. See also if there are any resources (e.g., expertise, networking, student interns, in-kind or financial support) they can contribute.
3. **Organize a brainstorming session with interested stakeholders to consider models that would work for your campus.** Keep in mind current and upcoming campus initiatives, departmental and program goals, and events (e.g., open houses; Homecoming Weekend; employment fairs), and consider how the campus could shape and time this series to complement and support these goals.
4. **Identify a “home” department or office that will, if needed, provide primary support for the series.** It’s always good to have a designated “home” department or office that can take the lead, or pick up any slack, when needed. Primary support may be thought of in terms of logistical, financial, secretarial, work-study, networking, or other support.
5. **Solicit key stakeholders to join an organizing committee.** Assemble an organizing committee and come up with a proposed model for the series, a detailed project-management plan for mounting the series, a timeframe for implementation, and a realistic budget.

TIP: The organizing committee 1.0 need not represent the range of professional writing on your campus. As desirable as it would be to have full representation, you may find

that it's easier to recruit some partners after the series has built a track record and some buzz.

TIP: Bring in partners in stages: invite alumni writers from their disciplines and divisions and engage their faculty and students during the residency. You may find a natural partner!

6. **In consultation with campus experts, come up with learning outcomes for the series, as well as with an assessment plan that will objectively measure the series' impact.** As you draft learning outcomes, consider how they can connect to institutional goals, strategic plans, and initiatives from multiple constituencies, academic and administrative. The more the series' outcomes are cross-walked with other departmental, divisional, and campus-wide initiatives, the easier it will be to bring on additional sponsors and partners and to garner support.
7. **Secure funding.** Unless your campus has an office or program willing to incorporate the series into its ongoing budget and activities, you will likely need to secure funding by any combination of the following means: on- or off-campus grants and/or sponsors; financial and/or in-kind support pledged by partners; target funding from a supportive administrator; an alumnus or alumna who may be interested in the opportunity to endow the series; advertisement revenue if the series produces print- or web-based materials. Remember to include sponsors' and donors' names on all publicity materials online and in print.
8. **Work with your campus's career services office to create internships and to recruit interns.** Based on our experiences, the series can provide multiple opportunities for students to develop professional competencies and to create portfolios of their work. Our series has benefitted from working with video interns to document events and craft short YouTube videos capturing the arc of an overall residency; a web intern to design, update, and energize the series' online presence; one or more marketing and/or graphic design interns to produce publicity materials; a social media intern to manage the series' social media; and a graduate assistant to draft copy and grant applications, to liaise to different constituents, and to build itineraries.

ETHICAL CONCERN: To ensure these are quality applied-learning experiences, take on only as many student interns and assistants as the series staff can actively and conscientiously mentor. Create a learning contract that incorporates specific learning outcomes. Build in weekly or biweekly standing meetings and require regular critical reflections so the interns can gauge their progress and document their achievements. In addition, constructively critique student work and be sure to give students public credit for their contributions. Videos and materials produced should identify student authors; students can also gain public-speaking skills by introducing alumni writers.

9. **Draft lists of potential alumni writers to invite, aiming for diversity in as many of the following areas as possible:** academic disciplines, professional careers, graduation years, career stages, and intercultural backgrounds. Aim as well to represent writing for different audiences,

purposes, formats, and mediums. Ideally, any single year's roster would represent as broad a range of career pathways and professional-writing contexts as possible.

10. **Invite your writers and then collaboratively divide tasks among members of the organizing committee, matching tasks to members' strengths and backgrounds.** Empowering committee members to match their professional skills and networks to their service has lasting rewards. Not only does it break down ineffective silos, but it turns committee members into ambassadors for the series, engaging support from their "home" disciplines, offices, and divisions.
11. **Work closely with any student interns and assistants.** Help students to understand and to embrace series' goals, processes, and artifacts. Help students learn how to navigate the university and its organizational charts. Mentor students responsibly, offering constructive feedback and supporting their real-world growth in a safe environment.
12. **Establish regular meetings and utilize collaborative tools (e.g., Google Hangouts, Google Drive) to facilitate asynchronous collaboration.**

TIP: For campuses using Google Drive or Google Docs, develop a mechanism for clearly labeling drafts versus finished documents. Remember also to share access with all current collaborators and to update access periodically. Be thoughtful about permissions granted and file-naming conventions. Remember to archive all final documents, including videos and images that are accessed by web links. These expire!

13. **Plan each residency, establishing a clear process for tasks and sign-offs.**
 - a. **Make travel, food, and lodging arrangements for the alumni writer(s).** The better you can ensure that the writer's basic needs will be met, and the better—and earlier—you can communicate this to your writer, the more your writer will be able to focus on meeting the needs of your students. A writer-in-residence who must fend for parking or coffee, struggle to access the Internet, or worry about getting to or from an airport won't be able to bring her highest self. Thus, even if you are arranging formal meals for every mealtime, consider providing each writer with a preloaded campus card. With limited free time during the residency, your writer will appreciate being able to get what she needs, when she needs it.
 - b. **As early as possible, reserve rooms for public events.** Search for smart rooms with good acoustics, and make sure the equipment in the room will work with any technology the writer is bringing or plans to use (if not, make reservations to borrow any needed equipment). A centrally located, familiar campus space can often help draw in students, as can free food (see below).
 - c. **Work closely with each alumni writer to develop a residency that tailors each event to the writer's needs, skills, expertise, and interests.**

SUGGESTION: Our writing series asks each alumni writer to give at least one public talk that emphasizes the importance of writing in their profession and shares some professional-writing tips and tricks with current students. We also ask each alumni writer to offer a hands-on writing workshop of their choice. Some alumni writers have elected to constructively critique student work (e.g., senior capstone posters, professional documents, marketing copy); others bring in real-world examples from their jobs (e.g., writing a fundraising letter, making a persuasive pitch) and engage students in the challenges of crafting a document that meets the stated purpose, audience, and context.

- d. **Develop and share a detailed itinerary that covers the scope of the entire residency and that contains contact information for key players.** It's not just the alumni writer who needs to know what is happening when. Everyone on the team needs this information. The itinerary also has a second purpose: to inform the campus's public relations staff about the full complement of events, including closed events such as class visits or meals that would not be listed in publicity materials. Having the cell phone numbers for key players in one place can also be invaluable if an issue arises during a residency and you need to reach someone quickly.
- e. **Prepare for your alumni writer a folder containing everything needed for the residency.** In addition to the detailed itinerary with contact information, this folder should contain information about anything the writer is expected to do, such as return a meal card or room key before departure. The folder should also contain any materials the writer will need, such as a parking pass, wi-fi password, room key, or meal card.
- f. **Create and maintain a realistic budget, making changes in real time and being sure to balance the books.**
- g. **Create publicity materials and collaboratively critique these by as many parties as possible to ensure accurate information, eye-catching design, and, most of all, compliance with campus policies and with copyright and fair-use practices. Also, make sure all promotional materials acknowledge series' funders and sponsors.**

TIP: For every image used, make sure that you or your writer-in-residence holds the rights to use and to distribute it. Ask for confirmation in writing from each writer.

- h. **Identify classes that align with the writer's background and skills.** Reach out to faculty to arrange class visits that meet curricular objectives for the course while providing students with an applied-learning perspective from your alumni writer.
- i. **Identify student groups that could benefit from the alumni writer's skill set.** Develop relationships and invite these groups either to attend events or to work with either the career services office or the series staff to organize their own event with the speaker.

- j. **Make reservations for food.** These reservations may range from modest refreshments to upscale receptions for planned public events. They should also include opportunities for small groups of students to interact with the alumni writer over a meal or a coffee. These opportunities are meant to facilitate networking for students in the alumni writer's field.
- k. **Work with faculty and offices across campus to identify students who would benefit most from the opportunity to have a meal or coffee with the invited writer.**

ETHICAL CONCERN: Always plan for a cohort of at least four people, ideally with a campus staff or faculty member present; no cohort should have fewer than two students. We have found, however, that a cohort of more than four or five students can be challenging unless the students share a common background (i.e., members of the same student club).

- l. **Work collaboratively with the appropriate campus offices and departments to promote each residency.** See if your marketing department can help generate press releases and secure listings and coverage in print, broadcast, and social media. Seek out support from relevant departments and offices on campus to promote these events via listservs. If your campus has student-run media stations, try to get the visiting writer featured on any relevant radio and TV programs or podcasts.
- m. **Work with student interns and with campus personnel to document these events.** Consider scheduling an interview and a photography session with the alumni writer. Consider as well interviewing students who attend these events to obtain anecdotal support for the series' impact.

ETHICAL CONCERN: You must obtain signed releases from anyone whose image or likeness is captured on film, video, or still photograph; this includes your alumni writer. Ask your campus if there are existing release forms that cover the series' needs. Be sure to consult with the campus's legal counsel if you are not certain which images require a release before they can be uploaded to a website or transmitted. This is especially true for any images captured during events that are not public (e.g., class visits; small-group sessions); photographs of minors also raise concerns that should be discussed with counsel.

- n. **Identify one or more staff members who can be available to the writer for any needs that arise.**
- o. **Identify individuals who can introduce the writer at public events and publicly thank the series' sponsors.** The most moving introductions are often delivered by former faculty, fellow alumni, or current students related to the alumni writer. If no introducer has a personal connection, then consider giving student interns or assistants the

opportunity to write and deliver an introduction. These introductions put the students front and center, giving them public recognition for their roles and a chance to develop important public-speaking skills.

- p. **Keep in touch with all involved parties.** It never hurts to confirm with students who are attending an invited meal that they can still make it. Likewise, a faculty member bringing the writer into class will appreciate an email reminder with details about when and where to meet the writer.

14. **During each residency, stay on top of all the details.**

- a. **Make sure your alumni writer receives the folder with all needed information and materials.** Arrange either for a series staff member to hand off these documents directly to the writer or for the documents to be waiting in the writer's room. If possible, arrange for a card and gift basket to be placed in the writer's room as well.
- b. **For each event, arrive early to doublecheck that the room is set up and that all technology is functional and interfaces with the alumni writer's equipment.**
- c. **Place signs outside or near locations to remind people of the time and location.**
- d. **Obtain publicity release forms from anyone whose image is captured.**
- e. **Gather data for assessment purposes.** At a minimum, track attendance for each event and each residency, seeking demographic information about the audience. Even better, develop assessment tools that can determine what students knew before an event and what they learned from the event itself. Designate one person per event to distribute and collect these forms. (The same person could also distribute and collect releases.)
- f. **Check in regularly with your writer to ensure any needs are being met.**
- g. **Send out reminders to campus listservs at least one day prior to each event.**

15. **After each event, close the loop.**

- a. **Send the writer a hand-written thank-you card and ask for feedback on the experience.** If your campus can send the alumni writer a gift, that's a nice touch. Sending something branded with the university logo can show thanks while creating a further opportunity for the writer to represent the campus.
- b. **Meet with the team to discuss what went well and what could have gone better and what changes may need to be implemented for the next residency.**
- c. **Securely download and store all media and documentation.**

- d. **Make sure all series documents are properly maintained and stored.** For example, be sure that signed releases are retained and are grouped by residency and by event; this will save time later if the series wishes to use an image for promotional purposes. Also, make sure to download and to review all video and audio footage so that any issues with corrupt files or temporary links can be determined early on.
 - e. **Track and record publicity.** The publicity will be helpful both for internal use and for use with any year-end reports, future grant applications, or campus-reporting tools.
- 16. **Each semester or each year, be sure to document all processes and roles for the series, and make sure all requirements for the series and for its student interns are met.**
 - a. **Ask each team member and especially each student intern or assistant to create a document describing what they do and when they do it in relation to events.** Archive these documents in case there is turnover in committee members and interns. Not having to reinvent the wheel or search for where a former committee member or intern archived materials will save considerable time and grief in the future.
 - b. **Make sure student interns have completed their requirements and have all supporting materials they need from staff members to document their experiences and the quality of their work.**
 - c. **Make sure as well that any year-end reports are filed in a timely fashion.**
- 17. **Review the assessment data and determine how successful the series has been in meeting its stated outcomes.** Assemble the team to discuss overall achievements, setbacks, and future goals, and work collaboratively to make the series even better and—most of all—to better equip students for writing for a range of careers and contexts.
- 18. **Review the overall series budget and revisit possible funding sources.** Assemble the team and consider how well the series could manage moving forward with the available resources. If additional funding is needed, consider approaching new potential donors and partners.
- 19. **Build partnerships beyond campus.** Area businesses that recognize the value of professional writing may enjoy being associated with the series, and these businesses could potentially create meaningful applied-learning opportunities for students. Your admissions office may be able to connect the series with prospective students who would be very interested in different residencies; inviting these students to campus could help influence their college choice.
- 20. **Maintain relationships with previously featured writers-in-residence.** Ask whom they would recommend for a residency. Also, reach out to these alumni writers to share achievements by current students or recent graduates who intend to work in the same field. Encourage alumni to

continue to engage with students, perhaps via informational interviews, mentorships, job-shadowing experiences, internships, etc.

21. **Show appreciation for staff, especially student interns and assistants.** Schedule a meal or casual event where series staff members can celebrate the series' achievements, acknowledge each other's hard work, and thank students for their contributions. Such an event can also give students the opportunity to ask members of the group for career advice and for recommendations.