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THE FRANCES PAYNE BOLTON SCHOOL OF NURSING
AT CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

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Writing ^ Process

Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing faculty, students and alumni have published nearly 90 scholarly manuscripts since the Scholarly Writing Workshop, a two-day intensive program, launched in Fall 2016. And the words are still flowing.

BY ELIZABETH LUNDBLAD

“Sometimes you just get stuck. You may write a part over and over, or you’re not sure how to organize your thoughts. It’s hard to diagnose your own difficulties.”

It’s quiet except for the scratching of pens on notepads, the shuffling of papers, and the movement of fingers across laptop keyboards. The environment has been likened to strict libraries or study halls where interruptions are shushed with alacrity.

“There are no phones, no email. We start early and work until the end of the day,” said Mary Terhaar, PhD, RN, FAAN, associate dean of academic affairs and the Arline H. and Curtis F. Garvin Professor of Nursing at Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing at Case Western Reserve University.

Breakfast, lunch, and coffee—lots of coffee—are provided for the writers, which number around 10 to 15 during each session with everyone logging about eight or nine hours of writing each day. In the summer, the workshops meet on Thursdays and Fridays, and monthly over a weekend during the school year.

“We have had more than 86 publications in about a year and a half, from faculty who also have significant teaching and research responsibilities,” she said. “That’s 86 contributions to the scientific literature—86 places where FPB is evident in the literature. And, we have a cadre of clinical faculty who previously had never published but are now successfully in press.”

One of those projects includes a chapter in a new textbook on advanced physiology for neonatal nurse practitioners, the first of its kind in the field. Amy Bieda, PhD, APRN, PNP-BC, NNP-BC, director of the undergraduate nursing program; Terhaar; and Mary Elaine Patrinos, MD, assistant professor of pediatrics at the School of Medicine are authors on the chapter on sexual reproduction. “This type of resource didn’t exist and we’ve needed one for years,” Bieda said.

For Terhaar—who launched the writing program with FPB faculty members Joyce Fitzpatrick, Irena Kenneley, and Donna Dowling—the workshops are about the nuts and bolts of scholarship, and helping faculty find their voices in the annals of scientific publication.

“If you carve a duck from a piece of wood it’s really simple—you just carve away everything that isn’t a duck,” said Terhaar, pointing to a carved duck in her office. “In writing you decide what to keep and what to carve away. It can be really hard, especially if you have lots of other demands for your time.”

For faculty who teach and have an active practice, writing the first article can be a daunting task without guidance.

“In the workshop you get to share your frustrations and your successes,” said Joyce Fitzpatrick, PhD, MBA, RN, FAAN, Elizabeth Brooks Ford Professor of Nursing. “We try to build a writing support group in addition to giving personalized feedback about individual publications.”

~~STRIPPING~~ BARRIERS TO WRITING

Removing the logistical and physical barriers to writing was one thing. Another barrier the workshop had to remove was plain old writer’s block.



"Sometimes you just get stuck," Terhaar said. "You may write a part over and over, or you're not sure how to organize your thoughts. It's hard to diagnose your own difficulties."

The workshop, Bieda said, is an excellent way to block off a period of time to work in quiet and focus.

While the majority of participants are FPB faculty and graduate students, the reputation of the nursing writing workshop is growing. Edwin Mayes, director of first-year experience and family programs at Case Western Reserve, began attending the workshop in fall 2017.

Mayes, who is working on his dissertation through Ohio University, said he had been struggling with the balance of being a full-time employee and finding the time and discipline to write.

"There's always something else that drags you away from writing," said Mayes, whose office supports the nursing school programs like Prepare 2 Care—1st year nursing student orientation—and the Stethoscope Ceremony. "I had a conversation with my nursing school colleagues about my writing struggles and their support was very motivating, and they suggested the writing workshops."

Motivation is a recurring theme. On his first day as



faculty at the School of Nursing, David Foley, PhD, MSN, RN-BC, MPA, assistant professor and director of faculty development, joined the program.

"I had just walked in the door. I didn't really know where my office was," he said. "I sat down with a legal pad and started writing."

Those words he wrote in August 2017 were reworked and refined. He submitted the manuscript in October, and it was accepted for publication in January 2018.



Mary F. Terhaar, PhD, RN, ANEF, FAAN



Joyce J. Fitzpatrick, PhD, MBA, RN, FAAN



David M. Foley, PhD, MSN, RN-BC, MPA

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PRESSURE TO PUBLISH

“As in many academic nursing environments, particularly in research intensive schools of nursing, there’s a lot of pressure on faculty to publish,” Fitzpatrick said. “And nurses often—including faculty—have not been socialized into publication as part of their responsibilities.”

Fitzpatrick said the writing workshop has two goals: to disseminate the good work that FPB faculty and alumni are doing, and give them the skills to publish.

“All of our faculty are doing excellent work,” she added. “My experience is that everyone has at least one good publication waiting to come out.”

For Foley, having the block of protected time allowed him to better organize thoughts that were formulated in bits and pieces in the weeks preceding a workshop and translate those thoughts into the written word. It’s also a

time to talk to colleagues and receive feedback, opinions, and suggestions for alternative publication avenues.

“It’s an opportunity to make ourselves vulnerable a little bit, and realize that we’re all facing the same issues with writing,” he said. “We can let our defenses down, and say we’re dealing with the same pressures of trying to produce high-quality scholarly work. Some are new to it and others are not.”

THE NEXT DRAFT

The Scholarly Writing Workshops, now a powerful part of the School’s infrastructure, are available to help people achieve success, Foley said. It’s something that faculty and students should appreciate because other nursing schools don’t offer similar programs of this caliber.

“One of the things that the workshop demonstrates is that nursing is a lifelong learning process,” Bieda said. “You never stop moving forward.”

While workshops are primarily attended by faculty members and graduate students, Bieda said the workshops have given her some ideas for BSN students.

“I’m hoping to involve more undergrads to attend and write during the school year, but it’s challenging for them given their other commitments,” she said. “As faculty, we need to develop strategies to help them become better scientific writers as a basic foundation of learning.”

Workshop participants and organizers are excited for what the progress signifies for FPB faculty. “We’re helping faculty develop a sustained pattern of productivity that promotes themselves, the FPB School of Nursing, and the field of nursing,” Terhaar said.

