The Princeton Writing Program, dedicated to encouraging excellence in writing and the teaching of writing throughout the University, fulfills its mission through four core initiatives: the Writing Seminars, the Writing Center, Writing in Science and Engineering (WSE), and Writing Across the University.

**The Writing Seminars**

Each year, the Princeton Writing Program offers over 100 Writing Seminars of 12 students each on a wide variety of special topics, from the ethics of human experimentation to the cultural reception of Darwin, from witnessing war to consumerism and fandom. Every Princeton freshman, without exception, is required to complete a Writing Seminar in fulfillment of the University writing requirement.

The Writing Seminars give Princeton freshmen an early opportunity to belong to a lively academic community in which members investigate a shared topic and discuss their writing together, with the aim of clarifying and deepening their thinking. Focused instruction on the writing process and the key elements of academic writing enriches and guides the Writing Seminar experience. Students learn how to frame compelling questions, position an argument within a genuine academic debate, substantiate and organize claims, purposefully integrate a wide variety of sources, and revise for greater cogency and clarity. Through an extensive collaboration with the University library, Writing Seminar students also learn to use databases to locate and evaluate sources. Writing Seminars are interdisciplinary in nature to emphasize transferable reading, writing, and research skills.

Writing Seminar faculty number 35-40 each year and include post-doctoral lecturers recruited in a national search to teach in the Program, as well as Princeton professors from a range of academic departments, qualified Princeton administrators and staff, and Princeton graduate students who are in the final stage of dissertation-writing. For lecturers, the course load is typically two seminars per term, usually on the same topic; for graduate student fellows, it’s one seminar per term; for all others, it’s one seminar per academic year. The teaching staff is among the most disciplinarily diverse of any program in the country. Writing seminars are both writing-centered and topic-based; the instructor’s difficult task is to use the topic of the seminar as a vehicle for teaching strategies and techniques of college-level argument.

Writing Seminar faculty design their own Writing Seminars according to shared curricular guidelines, as follows:

1. Writing Seminars meet for two 80-minute periods per week. In class, students discuss readings (often in terms of writing), receive instruction on key writing skills, and examine their own writing
in draft workshops and small groups. Classes are designed to engage students as actively as possible.

(2) Faculty offer feedback on pre-drafts, as well as extensive marginal and cover comments on three drafts and four final revised essays. They also discuss drafts-in-progress with student writers in required individual and small group conferences. For experienced faculty, this intensive engagement with student writing outside of class time averages 20 hours per student each semester. For new faculty, the average is often significantly higher as they learn strategies for diagnosis and effective feedback.

(3) Unlike most other courses, which are organized primarily around readings, Writing Seminars are organized primarily around writing, totaling about 30 finished pages. The major assignments include (i) a short argument engaging 1-3 sources (5-6 pp.), (ii) a more complex argument engaging several primary and theoretical texts (7-8 pp.), (iii) an innovative researched argument on a topic of the student’s choosing (10-12 pp.), and (iv) a short, flexible final assignment due the day before Dean’s Date in January and May.

(4) Because the primary focus of the Writing Seminar is on the students’ own writing, assigned readings are limited to approximately 500 pages per term and include a variety of sources: those serving as a primary focus of analysis, as well as contextual, theoretical, and critical texts. In addition to the assigned readings and drafts in progress, students read sources that they locate independently for the research essay.

Writing Program directors work closely with new faculty in the Spring and Summer to design courses that will have broad appeal to incoming freshmen while providing opportunities for intensive engagement and exploration. Students enroll in Writing Seminars by ranking their top 8 choices; an optimization software program places students by balancing preferences and availability. Careful course design is essential to ensure that students across the different seminars share a common experience of intensive writing. Accommodating the complexity of students’ schedules requires that many Writing Seminars be scheduled in the early morning or in the evening.

All new faculty meet for three intensive days of teaching workshops at the end of May, meet for two additional days of training in the Fall, and participate in a Teaching Workshop series in the Fall term. The full faculty convenes for a Fall retreat in September. Faculty also participate in a range of faculty development workshops focused on developing a coherent writing pedagogy, using shared grading standards, and teaching research skills, among other things.

The directors visit classes and meet with faculty to discuss student writing (including comments and grades) and student course evaluations. All new faculty are required to submit teaching portfolios for review midway through the year. Faculty are organized into “mentoring pairs” to exchange class visits. To encourage teaching innovation and exchange, faculty have access to a password-protected Blackboard site that serves as an archive of teaching materials, from sample syllabi to lesson plans to assignments.

The work of the Writing Seminars is complemented by the Writing Program’s other core initiatives:
The Writing Center. The Writing Center offers all Princeton undergraduate and graduate students free one-on-one conferences with experienced fellow writers trained to consult on assignments in any discipline. Writing Center Fellows work with students at any stage in the writing process: brainstorming ideas, developing a thesis, structuring an argument, or revising a draft. Special appointments are available for independent projects, research proposals, and oral presentations, as well as for students participating in the Freshman Scholars Institute or applying to medical school. The Writing Center’s staff of 65 experienced Fellows holds 3,500 conferences per year. Writing Center conferences complement, but do not replace, the mentorship students receive from their teachers and advisors.

Writing in Science and Engineering (WSE). Recognizing the special challenges of writing about technical subjects, the Princeton Writing Program has developed Writing in Science and Engineering (WSE), an initiative for writers in science, engineering, and other quantitative fields such as economics, sociology, and political science. Each year, WSE offers several sections of two non-credit graduate half-term courses—WRI 501, for international graduate students on reading the scientific literature, and WRI 502, for advanced graduate students in the early stages of drafting a research article for publication. In addition, the WSE program offers a wide array of writing workshops designed specifically for writers working in quantitative disciplines.

Writing Across the University. Writing is integral to intellectual pursuits of every kind, whether in the humanities, the social or natural sciences, mathematics, or engineering. In that spirit, the Writing Program enhances the culture of writing across the University through a range of partnerships, including Dissertation Boot Camps, in collaboration with the Graduate School; Senior Thesis Writing Groups, in collaboration with participating departments; and Ways of Knowing Seminars, in collaboration with the Freshman Scholars Institute. The Writing Program also offers consultations with faculty and graduate student instructors on integrating writing into courses, designing effective assignments, grading and commenting on student work, and preparing upperclassmen for the JP and Thesis.

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