

Teaching Writing in Summer Programs for Pre-College Students November 2024

You may know that the Writing Program is busy during the summer—teaching writing courses, consulting in the WRC, and preparing for the upcoming academic year with placement, scheduling, and assessment. But you probably didn't know that several of our faculty facilitate writing courses for two wonderful summer programs at the university: the [Summer Enrichment Opportunity/Youth Engaged in Science \(SEO/YES\) Program](#) in the SOM Comprehensive Care Center and the [Emerging Scholars Program \(ESP\)](#) in the College of Arts & Sciences.



Summer Writing Faculty Xia Wu, Reda Mohammed, and Ana Codita

Both programs originated in the scientific community with the goal of encouraging pre-college students to develop interest and skill in STEM fields. Insightfully, the directors of these programs saw the need to also include support for these students' communication skills, knowing that scientists develop and share their knowledge through writing and speaking with other scientists and the public. Those directors came to the Writing Program, where we have been able to design and facilitate two very effective and inspiring curricula with the care, expertise, and enthusiasm of several members of the **Writing Program Faculty** over the past several years.

Cara Byrne, Ana Codita, Kris Kelly, and Heidi Moawad led the [Summer Enrichment Opportunity/Youth Engaged in Science \(SEO/YES\) Program](#) this past summer. The SEO/YES Program, supported by local philanthropy and foundations Case Comprehensive Cancer Center, and the CWRU School of Medicine (SOM) brings in students from the surrounding Northeast Ohio high schools, including the Cleveland Metropolitan School District to perform scientific research with a faculty mentor in a laboratory affiliated with CWRU. Students learn how to do lab work, but also how to be a scientist. The Writing Workshops were designed to help students view writing and speaking as key skills for the development of scientific knowledge. Prior to our involvement, the Program has students write a scientific manuscript about their lab work and then present a scientific poster at a student symposium. But beginning in 2020, the Writing Program provided students with instruction and support through a series of weekly workshops. Now students are building research skills, critically reading scientific articles, learning IMRaD style, finding new

composing processes, and then translating their written report into a public presentation including a spoken and multimodal component. Most importantly, though, perhaps, these pre-college students are learning scientific literacy, which will encourage and enable them to participate actively in STEM education and STEM fields.

Teaching writing to high school students falls a little out of our usual purview, but our instructors have endeavored to adapt what they know about teaching writing and to learn from the needs of the program and these young developing scholars.

Dr. Ana Codita, who has taught in the program for the past two summers explains, it is worth it:

“I believe that writing for research purposes should be available and accessible to everyone, regardless of their academic phase (high school, undergraduate or graduate level) and background (public or private school and socioeconomic status, among others). Every student has brought their own experiences, questions, curiosities, and enthusiasm to our classroom so for me it has been inspiring to break down the phases and skills of writing a complex genre such as a research article to a group of such young writers.”

Similarly, **Dr. Heidi Moawad**, new to the SEO/YES Program but a recognized SAGES instructor and physician, wrote, “Our ... students organize their knowledge and research goals. Often, using a guideline of writing “steps” helps students recognize small gaps of information, and they work throughout the week to find the answers to these gaps.”



Dr. Cara Byrne with several of the 2024 summer SEO/YES Program students.

Dr. Cara Byrne, who has been instrumental in developing the curriculum over several years and iterations, also sees the value of collaboration around writing in these workshops. Working with the youngest group (ninth graders!), she writes: “While the students receive a lot of feedback and one-on-one writing support from me, there is also a lot of peer review. One of the highlights of the workshop is seeing friendships develop and watching students encourage each other.”

For veteran and co-designer of the Writing Workshops, **Dr. Kris Kelly**, there is much to learn by participating in these types of programs:

“My students were all rising 10th graders and reminded me of our first years—smart and focused but also curious and a little tentative—and it was really exciting to see their growing confidence as writers and speakers over the 6 weeks of the program

as they became more invested and knowledgeable about their areas of study. As a teacher, I valued the opportunity to learn more about the conventions of scientific writing and to gain an understanding of how that form shapes our understanding of scientists' research and findings.”



Reda Mohammed and Xia Wu with some of the 2024 ESP Students

A **second program** that has involved our writing faculty for even longer, the [**Emerging Scholars Program \(ESP\)**](#), provides a summer bridge program for ESP students entering CWRU each fall. While this bridge program was inspired by math curricula for underprepared students, the director, Dr. Steven Haynesworth, added a writing component to CWRU's version early in the development of this mentoring-oriented program. During the summer, ESP students take ENGL 147: Emerging Writers' Studio, a six-week intensive 3-credit course designed to prepare them for writing in the general education

curriculum (SAGES First Seminar, then AIQS). Co-taught each summer with Writing Program Faculty ranging from the chair of the English Department (Walt Hunter, 2023) to English MA and PhD graduate TAs, the course gives students experience with “habits of the writers' mind,” composing process, critical writing skills, and opportunities to think about the ways their future disciplines used communication to develop knowledge and collaborate. Last summer's instructors, Dr. Reda Mohammed and Dr. Xia Wu, worked with twelve students in ESP to support not only their writing and academic success, but to welcome them to the university and empower them with skills they need to participate in our campus community.

The Writing Program partners with departments and programs all over the university and highly values these opportunities to share and learn about the needs of writers and writing instructors across the disciplines and the community. But those relationships are only as good as the people who maintain them, and that is our writing faculty, who adapt to new programmatic goals, collaborate with colleagues who have different ideas about the role of writing instruction, and empower students with agency and literacy to use writing to gain access to education, careers, and their own desires.