

AALAC Workshop Grant Application

Title: Writing & Critical Inquiry in the First-Year Classroom

Co-organizers:

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Workshop Description

Critical inquiry and writing are cornerstones of a liberal arts education, and the first-year classroom, as the place where students are introduced to approaches to and methodologies of critical inquiry and writing, is an integral part of the educational experience at AALAC member institutions. Member institutions have various approaches to teaching first-year students writing and critical thinking across disciplines and preparing them for future studies, including dedicated writing courses, first-year seminars, and writing-intensive disciplinary courses. Many also have courses focused on serving academically underprepared and/or ESL and ELL students.

This workshop will enable faculty from participating institutions to share practical strategies and best practices for writing and critical inquiry in the first-year classroom and to hear about new research and scholarship in the field, including that directed at diversity and inclusion in this critical academic space. The constituency for this workshop will include those directing writing programs, first-year seminar programs, and writing-intensive courses directed at first-year students.

Having recently completed an extensive curriculum review that resulted in meaningful changes to its First-Year Writing and First-Year Seminar Programs, Barnard is particularly well suited to hosting this workshop. Mount Holyoke has also recently undergone a period of transition in which they designated all of their First-Year Seminar courses writing-intensive. These two examples represent a broader conversation happening at AALAC member institutions about writing and the first-year classroom—a conversation that is influencing curriculums and programs.

We believe this workshop is well timed to address essential questions about the first-year classroom, including:

- What are the common elements that characterize critical thinking across disciplines in general and in the first-year classroom in particular? In what ways does critical thinking

look different in different disciplines at this stage of a student's academic and intellectual development?

- How do we help faculty prepare to teach FYS courses, especially faculty with little/no formal pedagogical training in this area? What kinds of workshops or training are most useful for faculty?
- How do we effectively engage with first-year students (both in the classroom and in constructing our syllabi) who are increasingly reflecting on their own positionality and identities? How can faculty create inclusive spaces for first-year students from diverse backgrounds?
- How do we balance attention to basic writing skills with attention to critical thought and idea development, especially with diverse preparation levels and language backgrounds?
- How might we draw on recent scholarship on “transfer” and transferable skills in shaping writing programs at our institutions? More broadly, how can we draw on the insights of scholarship in the field of composition in non-composition focused programs (e.g. First-Year Seminars)?

Anticipated Follow-up Activities

After the workshop, we will:

- Maintain a network of colleagues focused on writing in the first-year classroom, facilitated through a listerv.
- Create an online repository for materials shared during the workshop.
- Share the outcomes of our conference more broadly in a breakout session at the Ivy Plus Writing Conference, at CCCC and AAC&U, and/or conferences in our disciplinary homes.

We will solicit ideas for other follow-up activities from presenters and participants at the workshop.

Workshop Schedule/Structure

The workshop will take place over two days (Friday and Saturday) in Fall 2018, at the Barnard campus. The schedule will include panel presentations, roundtables, and interactive workshops, along with opportunities for participants to share insights into what works well at their own institutions. Panels, roundtables, and workshops will be led by faculty from AALAC member institutions (see below). The workshop will also feature a keynote from an invited speaker recognized for their work on the subject of writing and “transfer.”

Schedule:

Friday	Saturday
Breakfast	Breakfast
Morning Panel/Workshop #1	Morning Panel/Workshop #1
Morning Panel/Workshop #2	Morning Panel/Workshop #2
Lunch	Lunch
Afternoon Panel/Workshop	Afternoon Panel/Workshop
Reception	
Keynote	
Dinner	