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Writer's Boot Camp Brings Faculty Together, Improves Skills

February 15, 2017



Since 2014, Georgia Southern University's Centers for Teaching and Technology (CT2) has offered a Writer's Bootcamp for faculty interested in substantial, structured writing time. Four times a year faculty are invited to come together for four days to focus on writing.

Peggy Lindsey, Ph.D., first came to Georgia Southern in 2012 from the University of Dayton, where she had been part of an informal writers group. After she learned about a more structured model at a conference, she was determined to start something similar at Georgia Southern. She found willing collaborators in the CT2.

Writer's Bootcamp started small with six participants and the event being held at the CT2. They have since outgrown that space and now take over three classrooms for each session.

The sessions are structured in 75-minute writing blocks, followed by 15-minute breaks, from 8:45 AM to 3:30 PM each day. At the beginning of the first day, participants from across campus and colleges share their goals for the week and a little bit about what they are writing. This has actually inspired conversations (during breaks) that have led to collaborations. At the most recent boot camp, for example, two faculty members finished co-authoring an article after having met in an earlier boot camp.

At the end of each day, participants share their progress and receive a "prize" for doing the tough work of a day of writing. Lindsey explained that it is a way to say, "You made it through the day! We're glad you're here. Keep coming." Lindsey puts together many of the prizes herself. Monday, for example, they get office supplies. Tuesday the focus is on health and wellness; on this day, they get a coaster with the Boot Camp logo, and a water bottle. Wednesday they get a survival kit (with items such as Snickers "for when you need a little laugh," a silly straw "for when you need to suck it up and get to work," and a sanitizing wipe "for when a project becomes a big mess"). Thursday they get their boot camp diploma. The total cost for the "prizes" is about \$20-30 per session. CT2 also provides tea and coffee; participants are encouraged to bring their own lunch and, if desired, snacks to share.

Participants must commit to the entire four-day session. As described on the Boot Camp website, “presence is essential to the boot camp esprit de corps—the willingness of all participants to keep slogging away all day every day, not only to meet their own goals, but to inspire those sitting around them to keep going as well” (<https://sites.google.com/a/georgiasouthern.edu/ct2-writers-boot-camp/home/extendedbootcamps>).

Jamie Scalera, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Political Science and International Studies, has spent the past several boot camps working on a book. “I find the sense of community and accountability to be very motivating, since writing can often be a solitary endeavor,” she explained. “I also find the week-long camps at the end of the semester particularly helpful, as it gives me a sense of accomplishment before taking a much-needed break.” In fact, Scalera has found this model so worthwhile she has encouraged her Honors students to use 75-minute writing blocks for their thesis projects. “I create a chart each semester where they can record their boot camp sessions for the week (4 per week), and I have encouraged them to meet together in the library like the faculty do for boot camp. I think this has helped encourage good writing habits among my students.”

CT2 also offers Weekend Writer’s Boot Camps four times a year. These sessions follow a similar structure of 75-minute writing sessions and 15-minute breaks. Unlike the extended boot camps, however, the weekend sessions are more flexible and welcome participants to attend one or both days, and as many sessions per day as fits their schedules.

To learn more about Writer’s Boot Camp, visit their webpage, academics.georgiasouthern.edu/ctl/bootcamp/

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