

## **Scholar Associates Program Proposal**

**Dr. Andrew Velkey, Dr. Gary Green, Dr. George Hillow, Dr. Sanford Lopater, Dr. Patrick Walker**

**Background:** Christopher Newport University places a particular emphasis on excellence in undergraduate instruction, and has dedicated multiple resources and programs to enhance both the quality of instruction and the development of students' academic skills and abilities. One particular success is the Writing Associates program; this educational innovation pairs highly-skilled undergraduate students with a writing instructor to further the impact and benefits of instruction in Writing-Intensive courses. The success of the Writing Associates programs highlights the value of collaboration between highly-skilled peer instructors and faculty.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the proposed Scholar Associates model is to involve CNU students in peer mentoring and learning projects; to enable faculty across the university to provide classroom instruction informed by the latest findings in the respective fields, to encourage campus-wide discussion of informed and engaged pedagogies

**Description:** Similar programs for undergraduate students' support of teaching and scholarship are found at Brown<sup>1</sup>, Cornell<sup>2</sup>, and Duke University<sup>3</sup>. The CNU Scholar Associates program will assign trained undergraduates to specific courses with substantive research, creative, and scholarship components in order to provide students in those courses and the professors teaching them with a resource dedicated to the continued development of engaged and informed pedagogies in the respective fields. Scholar Associates, students enrolled in such courses, and professors will all benefit from this collaborative effort.

According to Takayama<sup>4</sup>, the following best practices should be followed when implementing a scholar associates program:

### **1. Selection of Scholar Associates should follow a clear and consistent process**

- a. Similar criteria should be used across the university in the selection of Scholar Associates, which could include (but aren't limited to):
  - i. Exceptional performance in the course of interest
  - ii. Outstanding overall academic performance (minimum GPA of 3.0)
  - iii. Strong motivation and interest in serving as a Scholar Associate
  - iv. Strong interpersonal skills
  - v. Demonstrated excellence in academic preparation and study skills
- b. Selection criteria do not need to be identical across the colleges, but should be uniform within a department.
- c. Scholar Associates may be nominated by a faculty member and the respective Departmental chairperson, but additional screening by a selection committee or director should take place.

### **2. Scholar Associate assignments and the nature of their work should be clearly articulated at the outset.**

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<sup>1</sup> [brown.edu/Administration/Sheridan\\_Center](http://brown.edu/Administration/Sheridan_Center)

<sup>2</sup> [www.ilr.cornell.edu/student-services/policies/ta.html](http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/student-services/policies/ta.html)

<sup>3</sup> [http://trinity.duke.edu/uploads/assets/UTABESTPRACTICES2008\\_09.pdf](http://trinity.duke.edu/uploads/assets/UTABESTPRACTICES2008_09.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [brown.edu/Administration/Sheridan\\_Center/teaching/documents/BestpracticeguidelinesforUGTAprograms.pdf](http://brown.edu/Administration/Sheridan_Center/teaching/documents/BestpracticeguidelinesforUGTAprograms.pdf)

- a. Peer instruction and mentoring assignments should clearly specify faculty and Scholar Associate's expectations
  - b. Scholar Associates may not be assigned sensitive duties such as proctoring examinations, grading examinations and other substantial assignments, or entering grades.
  - c. Scholar Associates may, as appropriate, deliver several guest lectures in the course, but they should not serve as "substitute teachers".
- 3. Scholar Associates should be provided training and mentorship.**
- a. The Scholar Associate and the faculty member should have a pre-defined schedule for regular meetings.
  - b. A statement of work should be developed no later than the 1<sup>st</sup> week of class that specifies the duties and responsibilities, task assignments, task processing goals, accounting for time on task, and designation of the grading and credit for work that is completed.
  - c. Scholar Associates should receive specific training on ethical issues in teaching and scholarship, the Honor Code, and how to address any ethical or Honor Code problems that may occur. Scholar Associates should also be trained on FERPA protections and limits, confidentiality, and managing dual roles as student and peer mentor.
  - d. Faculty should work closely with Scholar Associates throughout the semester to clarify tasks, duties, and assignments and avoid any ambiguity in the role the Scholar Associate is serving regarding the course.
- 4. Scholar Associates should be provided with opportunities to demonstrate their skills, knowledge, and scholarly attitude in order to establish credibility with the students enrolled in the course.**
- a. Better peer mentoring occurs when the credibility of the peer mentor is strongly established.
  - b. Such experience can be particularly useful for Scholar Associates who are considering graduate study where Teaching Assistantships are a common form of support for graduate students.
- 5. Scholar Associates should be substantially engaged in the course in order to contribute to student learning.**
- a. Engaged Scholar Associates will contribute to better student learning and a more enriching experience for the Scholar Associate. Such engagement can include:
    - i. Leading discussions
    - ii. Leading review sessions, tutorials, or labs
    - iii. Providing formative feedback on drafts of students' work
    - iv. Running focus groups to obtain student feedback on course experiences
- 6. A comprehensive approach for including Scholar Associates should benefit everyone involved in the course (associates, students, faculty members), and can lead to the application and sustainability of other good practices.**
- a. Benefits for Scholar Associates include
    - i. Developing a better appreciation for faculty expectations regarding quality work.
    - ii. Improving their academic skills.
    - iii. Building a greater depth of content knowledge.

- iv. Refining their time-management skills
- v. Developing academic leadership skills
- vi. Strengthening their connections with faculty
- b. Benefits for students include:
  - i. Enhancing their development of academic skills
  - ii. Appreciating faculty expectations for quality work
  - iii. Learning about the collaborative nature of teaching and learning
  - iv. Developing a greater depth of content knowledge
  - v. Increasing their opportunity for constructive criticism and feedback
- c. Benefits for Faculty include:
  - i. Offering better preparation for their courses
  - ii. Increase the extent to which they can provide up-to-date findings in the field.
  - iii. Develop mentoring skills
  - iv. Providing opportunities for more immediate feedback on instructional effectiveness

**7. Scholar Associates should receive academic credit for their work**

- i. Due to the academic nature of their work, it is more consistent with CNU's values for undergraduate students to receive course credit rather than remuneration for their services.
- ii. Offering course credit in consideration for the Scholar Associates' work emphasizes the scholarly nature of their assignment.
- iii. Offering course credit also decreases the likelihood that a Scholar Associate would resign from their assignment, especially near the end of the semester.
- iv. This course credit would be similar to other forms of experiential credit offered at CNU (e.g. internship, independent study, etc.).
- v. The proposed course would be a new offering, ULLC 496 (or a departmental credit, e.g. ENGL 496), that would be designated as "Scholar Associate for *Course Title*".

A mechanism will be needed for training Associates, meeting with participating faculty members in orientation and evaluative sessions, and making course assignments. Where possible, Associates should be assigned to courses in their own disciplines (that is, a psychology major who is a Scholar Associate ideally will be assigned a psychology course). Faculty should work with their Department Chair to recommend promising students (especially majors) to the program; the submission of such recommendations guarantee the assignment of at least some Scholar Associates to their department.

## APPENDIX 1: Duties and Responsibilities

A. Undergraduate SA duties and responsibilities *may* include the following (specific duties and responsibilities will be provided by course instructor):

- Attend lectures
- Facilitate discussions
- Prepare review materials
- Hold extra review sessions for exams
- Obtain room for review sessions
- Request or acquire necessary equipment
- Hold regular office hours
- Tutor students
- Manage and respond to course-related e-mail
- Prepare Scholar for course materials
- Maintain/update Scholar for course materials
- Develop and maintain various course tools (e.g. discussion groups) on Scholar
- Assist with the preparation of assignments
- Assist with the preparation of test questions
- Prepare course attendance records
- Maintain course attendance records
- Request student assessments for course
- Proctor administration of IDEA measures
- Attend instructor/SA meetings
- Act as liaison/mediator between student and professor

B. The duties and responsibilities of Faculty Supervising Scholar Associates *may* include the following:

- the SA's role
- the instructor's role
- course objectives and goals
- communication between SA and instructor
- communication between SA and students
- required texts
- attendance in course lectures
- applicable pedagogical techniques
- office hours
- guidelines for the tutoring, running review sessions, and assisting with course preparation
- guidelines for dealing with academic dishonesty
- assigning the grade for the 496-credit at the completion of the semester