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First Year, PhD Program in English (American Studies)
Letter of Interest
FYW Program Support Committee Application

First Year Writing Office,

My roles as a First-Year Writing instructor and graduate student in literature have been equally challenging and eye-opening during my first year in the English Department at UConn. During this time, I found the support of my community to be integral to my always-evolving perspective as an instructor, and in an effort to forward this support, I offer my experience to the Program Support Committee and next year’s Introduction Week. While I could see myself excelling with Communications or Resource Development, I also would like to participate in Curriculum Development during this time. I have learned that my classroom functions best when I leave myself room to plan lessons and projects around the environment in which I teach and the diverse body of students writing in my class; with this in mind, I would like to consider ways in which FYW can highlight concepts of flexibility during Introduction week through its resources and Baseline Syllabi.

As a member of one of the first cohorts to work closely with the Baseline Syllabi, I would be able to provide experiential evidence as to how these syllabi work for a first-year instructor at UConn. While I only have two semesters of teaching experience under my belt, the baseline syllabi were not only my introduction to teaching at UConn, but also to teaching in general. This perspective, along with my work in ENGL 5100, has enabled me to see ways in which this introductory syllabus was incredibly formative to my teaching style. If I were to be accepted to the Program Support Committee, I would come prepared to discuss ways in which FYW can continue developing the work of the baseline syllabus to best represent the diverse body of students enrolled in ENGL 1010/1.

More specifically, I see an opportunity to reconsider our approach to the American-centered texts included on the baseline syllabi in order to create a more inclusive environment for international students. On the same subject, I would also like to consider ways in which we can better prepare incoming instructors for what it means to “speak and write across languages,” a statement that is part of the baseline syllabi but difficult to enact in the first weeks of a class for many instructors. In order to promote all students’ roles as participants within the space of the seminar as academic conversation, I suggest that we can do more to create an inclusive environment by contextualizing readings and planning readings around the identities and affinities of students. My input into this conversation would be guided by the work I have done in ENGL 5100 on translingualism, research I have done since, and my own experiences in working with cultural and linguistic diversity in FYW.

Creating an inclusive environment is done with both planning and flexibility; the space between necessary day-to-day flexibility and the structure of the syllabus is in lesson planning, the aspect of writing instruction that I find to be most difficult as a new instructor. Some of the most useful elements in the 2015 “Resource Workbook” for me were sample handouts and activities, which I
turned to in moments of crisis when I thought – *What will my students do in this hour and forty-five minute block of time?* I see a potential for FYW to expand its digital repository of teaching resources for incoming students. Currently, many of these materials – such as sample essays and worksheets – are passed around informally, via email and Facebook. For example, I am forever indebted to colleagues such as Steve Mollmann for sharing handouts over UConn’s English Facebook group, which I have since personalized for my own classroom. To bolster literature in the hard-copy Resource Workbook, I suggest creating a more formal, digital space through Google Drives or Husky CT in which FYW can house such materials for all current writing instructors. I can foresee the cultivation of such a database to be a challenge, and I would be eager to work with FYW if the committee is interested in digitizing our resources.

To create an inquiry-based writing environment for our students, I suggest the importance of flexibility – a daunting word for a new instructor who may turn towards hours of planning for stability. I would be eager to continue a conversation with my colleagues regarding the work and resources for Introduction Week and how we can allow incoming instructors to feel both prepared and flexible in their first-semester classrooms.