

Creating a Mentoring Community through Faculty Writing Retreats at a Teaching Intensive, Minority Serving University: The HUI Scholars Program

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The HUI Scholars Program at Hawai'i Pacific University was established to address challenges in conducting research at teaching-intensive colleges. The HUI Scholars Program complemented the Hawai'i Pacific University's Undergraduate Infrastructure Student Research Center (HUI SRC) by encouraging faculty to engage in mentorship training. The program focuses on scientific writing, grantsmanship, and career progression, benefiting faculty and students. Faculty surveys were conducted at three-time points to evaluate one aspect of the program (writing retreats). Evaluation findings showed increased confidence in research skills, improved publication and grant-writing abilities, and reduced writing anxiety among 15 faculty participants. This article underscores the importance of mentorship training that is aligned with faculty research.

Keywords: faculty development, mentoring, diversity, biomedical research.

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Introduction

Faculty at primarily undergraduate institutions (PUIs) have teaching and scholarship responsibilities. Still, heavy teaching loads and the need for more resources and research infrastructure are significant barriers to writing publications and successful grant applications (Eisenhower, 2019). For example, 80% of faculty respondents at a teaching-focused state college in Texas reported that time was the most challenging obstacle to grant writing (Sehlaoui et al., 2021). Additionally, total PUI awards accounted for less than 5% of all awards from the National Science Foundation (NSF) within the last decade, with more institutional resources increasing the likelihood of success (Slocum & Scholl, 2013). Previous research on minority-serving and teaching-intensive institutions also finds that faculty in these institutions face structural challenges in navigating their teaching, service, and professional goals while confronting sexism and racism (Chesney-Lind et al., 2006), overcoming professional isolation and lack of resources for professional development (Malji & Phan, 2022), and navigating safety of their mental health and wellbeing as faculty of color (Vakalahi & Stark, 2011). While funding mechanisms exist for PUIs and minority-serving institutions (MSI) at both NSF and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), many faculty often fail to apply and compete

for these opportunities, despite recent research that finds teaching and grant writing support (e.g., workshops, mentorship) can increase the diversity of grant submissions and publications (Hiatt et al., 2022).

One way to increase the research capacity of PUI and MSI faculty is to create a mentoring intervention that places faculty wellbeing at the core and to provide pathways for "increasingly diverse faculty to not only survive but to thrive" (Chesney-Lind et al., 2006). This article presents a nine-month faculty development initiative aligned with an undergraduate health research center called the Hawai'i Pacific University Undergraduate Infrastructure Student Research Center, or HUI SRC. The HUI SRC's goal is to support university-wide health research activities of undergraduate students, including student-led research studies (Vakalahi et al., 2023). Initially, the HUI SRC focused on undergraduate science development and independent biomedical research projects, assuming faculty knew how to mentor. Faculty were necessary to the undergraduate program, but faculty development was secondary to the undergraduate research experiences. This new faculty development initiative (HUI Scholars Program), which was funded through an administrative supplement from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences to a minority-serving, liberal arts institution in the Pacific,

engaged the faculty in scholarly activities and training in undergraduate mentorship, scientific publications, and grant writing.

Ecological Systems Perspective for Mentoring

The ecological systems perspective frames the mentoring relationship by considering systemic influences at various ecological levels (Dalhberg & Byars-Winston, 2019; Bronfenbrenner, 1993). This perspective suggests that factors at different levels (microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem, exosystem, and chronosystem) impact individual behaviors and relationships over time (Dalhberg & Byars-Winston, 2019). At the microsystem level, the quality of the mentor-mentee relationship is crucial. More distal factors, like exosystem influences (e.g., school and neighborhood) and macrosystem influences (e.g., cultural context), can facilitate or impede the mentoring relationship. For instance, faculty at teaching-intensive institutions may be reluctant to engage in research and mentorship activities due to different incentive structures.

A Student-Centered Entrepreneurship Development Training Model to Increase Diversity (ASCEND) in the Biomedical Research Workforce

ASCEND embraces the ecological systems perspective, was first developed at Morgan State University, a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), to diversify the biomedical workforce (Kamangar et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2023; Sheikhattari et al., 2022). A key pillar of ASCEND is to focus on an Entrepreneurial Research Training Model (ERTM) with four different stages: (1) inspiration through peers; (2) ideation and innovation through near peers; (3) implementation through faculty, and (4) growth through building a scientific community for students and faculty. HUI Scholars Program adapted this model for faculty at a private, teaching-intensive Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian (ANNH) Serving Institution and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPI).

The program aimed to boost faculty's professional growth, enabling them to mentor students effectively in research and career goals. Faculty writing retreats exemplify how ASCEND goals are implemented. These retreats provide dedicated time for writing and include training sessions that emphasize the dual focus on mentoring students and obtaining mentorship from peers and senior faculty. By fostering a supportive environment for professional development and community building, the writing retreats help faculty enhance their research skills and ability to guide students, aligning with the overarching objectives of the ASCEND ERTM.

The program intervened at multiple ecological levels of Hawai'i Pacific University's faculty members to promote effective mentorship of

undergraduate students. This included support for faculty-undergraduate student team research projects encouraging mentoring relationships at the microsystem level. Additionally, the program instituted interventions intended to impact the mesosystem level (HUI Scholars Program Writing Circles) and exosystem level (Mentoring Campus Community Training Initiative) to promote meaningful changes to the institutional climate. As a result of these activities, the program contextualized mentorship as a broader pipeline issue rather than a didactic faculty member-student construct. HUI Scholars were provided training, support, and mentorship by senior faculty members, which improved the capacity of faculty to mentor undergraduates in research. The goal of the overall program was to change the campus culture and climate for faculty, staff, and undergraduate students engaged in biomedical and health research.

While the multi-level program consisted of several components, the present study highlights findings from one innovative component--the HUI Writing Retreats. Writing retreats use this model to build mentorship by creating a supportive environment for writers. At the microsystem level, they provide one-on-one coaching and peer feedback groups. At the mesosystem level, retreats promote interactions between experienced and novice writers, fostering a community of practice. Exosystem influences, such as organizational support and professional networks, enhance the mentoring environment. Macrosystem factors, like cultural attitudes toward writing, shape the value placed on mentorship. Writing retreats effectively support writers' growth and development by addressing these multiple levels.

Method

Hawai'i Pacific University is a private, minority-serving (AANAPI) academic institution of higher education mainly focused on a liberal arts education. Faculty are expected to teach a high course load (8 3-credit contact hour courses per year), fulfill service obligations, and maintain an active scholarship agenda. Further, there are limited opportunities for course releases to support service and scholarship activities. The goal was to cultivate and support faculty as scholars and mentors to students who are members of the HUI SRC. The initiative focused on writing for publication and extramural grants to support faculty progression toward reappointment and promotion. Participation in the initiative was open to all faculty and required applicants to submit a current CV and 2-page proposal (with writing goals for 2022-2023 and specific goals for the retreats). The faculty committee reviewed all 15 applicants, and all applicants were selected to participate. The HUI Writing Retreats were a significant component of the HUI Scholars Program.

The writing retreats in Fall 2022 (n=2) and Spring 2023 (n=1) were strategically designed to

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support faculty members at various stages of their academic careers and research projects. Retreat 1 and Retreat 3, both held on-campus over two days, provided structured environments from 8 am to 8 pm on day one and from 8 am to 1 pm on day two, accommodating remote participation via Zoom. These sessions began with goal-setting exercises and ensured participants dedicated a minimum of 10 hours to writing. Retreat 3 specifically featured a session focused on crafting Specific Aims for NIH grant proposals, enhancing grant-writing skills crucial for academic advancement. In contrast, retreat 2 was conducted virtually over three hours via Zoom and focused on navigating scholarship and research for reappointment and promotion. This session also provided mentorship and editorial support tailored to the needs of faculty members engaging in scholarly activities. Each retreat culminated in a report-out session, allowing participants to share their progress and receive feedback, thereby fostering a collaborative environment to enhance research productivity and advance the university's academic mission.

Metrics, Measures, and Evaluation Designs

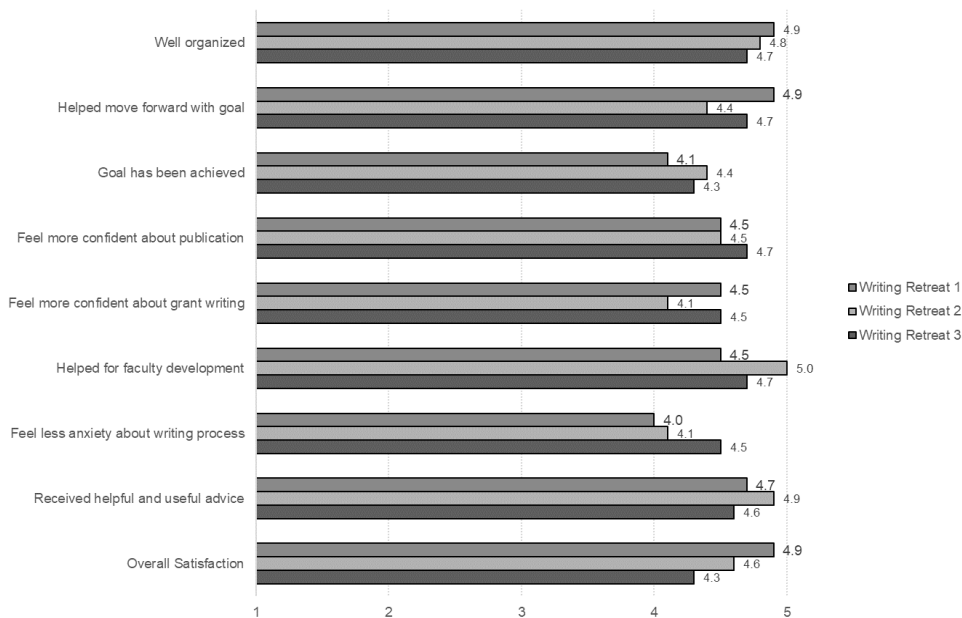
Faculty participants were expected to have finished and submitted a manuscript or grant proposal after completing the writing retreats. Additionally, they were expected to work on these writing goals all year, furthering their progress as scholars and mentors. For example, writing retreat participants could then leverage their progress to apply for travel grants for conference

presentations and pilot funding for research projects that included undergraduate research assistants.

Although faculty from other local universities were invited to participate in the writing retreats, Hawai'i Pacific University faculty were the primary focus for recruitment. The retreats consisted of 15 participants: 14/15 (93%) of the participants were faculty from Hawai'i Pacific University, and 1 participant was from the flagship state university. Gender breakdown consisted of four males (27%) and eleven females (73%). Ethnic and racial background consisted of the following: 2 (13%) Native Hawaiian, 1 (6.7%) Filipino, 2 (13%) American Indian or Alaska Native; 6 (40%) Asian; 1 (6.7%) Latino, and 10 (67%) White or Caucasian. Participants also identified with the following categories: 7 (47%) Basic Scientists, 7 (47%) Community-Based Participatory Researchers, 6 (40%) Clinical and Translational Researchers, and 4 (27%) Other.

A uniform battery of questions was asked between the three writing retreats to assess the impact on faculty development and writing progress. Participants were asked to rate on a Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) (1) how well organized the writing retreats were, (2) whether the writing retreats helped the participant move forward with their goals, (3) whether their goals were achieved, (4) whether they felt more confident about publications, (5) whether they felt more confident about grant writing, (6) whether the activities were helpful for faculty development, (7) whether they felt less

Figure 1
Satisfaction Level by Category with Three Writing Retreats



Note: Each writing retreat is not independent of one another. There were participants that attended only one writing retreat but also participants that attended all three retreats.

anxiety about the writing process, (8) whether they received helpful and useful advice, and (9) their overall satisfaction with the retreats. In this analysis, we compared each writing retreat separately. Writing retreat attendance ranged from individuals who attended only one session (n =16) to those who participated in all three writing retreats (n =8).

Results

This section provides an overall evaluation of participants post-writing retreats and themes from open-ended responses from the writing retreats. We excluded analyzing the writing retreat by demographics categories due to the small sample size (N = 15) and the limited variation in racial and ethnic identification of faculty. Figure 1 provides findings for the three different retreats, labeled 1, 2, and 3. The responses are rated on a scale from 1 to 5, with higher numbers indicating more positive outcomes. The chart evaluates various aspects of the writing retreats, such as organization, progress toward goals, achievement of goals, confidence about publication and grant writing, faculty development, anxiety about writing, reception of advice, and overall satisfaction.

The feedback on the writing retreats, on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest), shows that attendees were very pleased with the experience. The retreats were well organized, with high scores, suggesting they were smooth and well-planned events. Attendees also felt the retreats helped them make progress toward their goals, with high scores in this area. However, when it came to completely achieving their goals, the scores were lower. The retreats boosted attendees' confidence, especially regarding writing for peer-reviewed publications and grant applications, with these areas receiving some of the highest scores. It also was beneficial for faculty members' professional growth. One of the most significant outcomes was the reduction in anxiety about the writing process, showing that the retreat made writing feel less daunting.

Figure 1 shows consistent patterning of findings across the three groups of respondents, with each group rating the retreats with average scores greater than or equal to 4.0 out of 5.0 across all aspects. There were some slight differences between the groups, especially in how much they felt they achieved their goals and in their levels of anxiety, which hinted at varied experiences among different attendees. Overall, the writing retreats received high marks for being well-organized and helpful.

Themes from Open-Ended Responses Post Writing Retreats

In this section, we provide three themes from summaries of open-ended responses after the writing retreats (attendance varied at each retreat). The first theme underscores the value that faculty members place on making time for their

scholarship. This included time made for work, learning, and overcoming isolation. One faculty member encapsulated this sentiment, saying, "The chance to carve out time and dedicate to my scholarship," capturing the essence of this dedicated space. The structured environment, brimming with motivation, was pivotal; as another recounted, "The opportunity to work in a space where everyone was motivated to work on their own projects provided encouragement for me to push through the hours and focus." This sense of communal dedication was further enhanced by the fellowship experience, with a participant noting, "The sense of camaraderie helped make the process less lonely and even more enriching." The retreats were more than just about finding time; they were about creating an ecosystem where, as one faculty put it, they were "grateful for the opportunity to work with accomplished writers."

Addressing the common issue of isolation in academic endeavors was a second theme equally crucial. The retreats fostered a community atmosphere that one faculty member favored, "The social interaction with my peer group is my most favorable part. I felt like I am not alone just by being present in this group." The collective energy of working alongside others was a source of empowerment and inspiration, as reflected in comments like, "I appreciate the templates and resources sent to me by the HUI SRC! I like the networking with other faculty." The positive attitudes and sense of collectivism acted as a catalyst for productivity and empowerment. One member shared their challenges and solutions: "Talking to different people and hearing about their difficulties with writing and career development and how they overcame," underscoring the retreats' role in creating a forum for shared growth and overcoming professional hurdles.

The third theme delves into faculty career professional development within their current role and future career advancement. Faculty members tackled the challenges of juggling teaching-intensive roles and administrative duties, finding solace and strategy in "sharing with colleagues our experiences about negotiations." The retreat provided a forum for "truthful conversations about promotion, reappointment, and educational publishing companies' involvement in courses," which were invaluable to the participants. One faculty member appreciated the transparency and advice, stating, "I enjoyed the honesty and the 'pearls of wisdom' shared by the Mentors and other members." This collaborative environment enabled participants to "formulate goals, plans, and strategies for success" and to look to peers for "strategies for change." Another reflected on the communal understanding of academic pressures, "We had a very real conversation about the challenges of academic life... it was nice to see other people were experiencing the same thing."

The retreats served as a critical reminder for faculty to address their professional needs—a point often overshadowed by their dedication to

students and courses. One participant shared, “I really needed to know that I am not alone and that other accomplished, intelligent, driven faculty members share some of my concerns.” The retreats were also praised for providing a supportive space for discussing writing and career concerns, with another adding, “I truly appreciated the opportunity to talk about our writing concerns, take inventory of our writing strengths and challenges, and receive helpful tips to address our writing challenges.” The collective aspect of these retreats fostered a sense of solidarity and sparked motivation, as one faculty member excitedly shared, “I spent 3 hours writing on a Saturday morning - which would never happen without this retreat.” These gatherings proved to be a space for discussing university dynamics and departmental policies, creating a shared understanding that “others are struggling with many of the same issues and hearing how they are managing them.” Hearing how other faculty members manage these issues fostered a community of shared experiences and mutual support.

Similarly, participants’ open-ended responses from the March 2024 follow-up survey found that the writing retreats had a positive impact on the scholarly productivity and career advancement of the participants, although it should be noted that only 5 out of the original 15 participants completed the assessment. Since attending the retreats, 3 (60%) of the respondents submitted an article for publication, with 2 (40%) having successfully published their work. Furthermore, 4 (80%) of the respondents submitted grant proposals that were successfully funded. These outcomes demonstrated the efficacy of the writing retreats in helping scholars make significant progress on their writing projects and securing funding to support their research.

Participants’ open-ended responses further underscored the value of the writing retreats. One respondent described the retreats as “a gamechanger,” helping them “push out articles and grants.” Another participant, a new faculty member, found the retreats “incredibly helpful in getting [their] research going” and expressed enthusiasm for participating in and even organizing future retreats. The writing retreats also “created a great sense of community and momentum for research progress,” with one respondent simply stating, “I want more!” While one participant mentioned that they are still in the process of writing and submitting their paper that they worked on during the retreats, the overall feedback indicates a meaningful and positive impact on career development.

Discussion

Faculty at teaching intensive institutions often encounter challenges to balance the need to provide high quality education with the desire to advance their scholarly work, all while navigating institutional expectations and personal career

aspirations. Additionally, these educators grapple to do more with less resources. Such a landscape can leave faculty feeling isolated, underscoring the importance of creating supportive networks and dedicated spaces for collaborative growth, as well as structured time for writing and research, to ensure they can thrive both within and outside their immediate academic environments.

From the writing retreats, participants articulated the benefits of set-aside time for scholarship and peer interactions that provided valuable opportunities for work, learning, and overcoming the common sense of isolation. They stressed the importance of honest dialogue surrounding career advancement. Through this engagement, faculty found empowerment and solidarity, gaining insights into negotiating the dual demands of teaching and scholarship. These retreats and discussions highlighted the need for institutional support structures that address the unique teaching and scholarship challenges faced by faculty at teaching intensive institutions.

This evaluation of the writing retreats acknowledges several limitations. Firstly, the writing retreats were limited to two-day sessions. The brevity of these retreats may not have afforded participants sufficient time to fully realize their scholarly objectives, suggesting that extended retreats could potentially yield more substantial progress with informal support throughout the semester. Secondly, the initiative’s assessment data lacks the direct effects of the formal training programs on each participant’s outcomes. Another significant limitation is the self-selection bias inherent in the participation of those more inclined towards active research and mentorship. Also, faculty who participated should have been given additional opportunities to discuss and provide feedback to improve the program.

The HUI Scholars Program’s approach—recruiting faculty and mentoring them to navigate and surmount institutional challenges—has laid the groundwork for more mentorship infrastructure. The following year, the university adopted mentorship as a university-wide theme for the Academic Year 2023-2024. In summary, the HUI Writing Retreats, the HUI Scholars Program, and the broader university-wide mentoring initiatives exemplify the commitment to faculty development.

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Scott K. Okamoto, PhD, MSW, Professor is a researcher focusing on the social determinants of health and on developing evidence-based prevention interventions with indigenous and underserved communities. Since 2000, his research has been supported by the National Institute on Drug Abuse to examine the social and cultural contexts of substance use (i.e., alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use) for indigenous youth populations, and to translate those findings into culturally focused prevention interventions for those populations. For example, as faculty affiliate with the Southwest Interdisciplinary Research Center at Arizona State University, he co-led a multidisciplinary research team in the investigation of ecological factors contributing to substance use initiation for urban American Indian youth of the Southwest. These experiences led to a similar line of community-based participatory research focused on rural Hawaiian youth in Hawai'i. In addition to his current program of research, he has also published in the area of social services and systems of care for youth.