



# The BUMC Narrative Writing Program (NWP): Writing from the Front Lines of Clinical Care, Education, and Research

Christy D. Di Frances, PhD, MA,<sup>1</sup> Ellen Childs, PhD,<sup>2</sup> Emelia J. Benjamin, MD, ScM,<sup>1,2\*</sup> Sarah L. Wingerter, MD<sup>1\*</sup>  
Boston University School of Medicine<sup>1</sup> | Boston University School of Public Health<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Narrative-based education for health sciences professionals shows promise for fostering:

- Communication<sup>3</sup>
- Cultural competence<sup>4</sup>
- Empathy<sup>5,6</sup>
- Professionalism<sup>7,8</sup>
- Self-reflection to promote vitality and mitigate burnout<sup>7,9-11</sup>

Faculty writing groups and workshops may:

- Promote publications and presentations<sup>12-14</sup>
- Improve writing skills<sup>13-15</sup>
- Bolster confidence in writing<sup>13,14,16,17</sup>

Writing groups, writing workshops, and writing coaches lead to increased publication rates for participants.<sup>18</sup>

## OBJECTIVES

The NWP's educational objectives include:

- Developing **writing competencies**
- Aiding in the preparation of narrative writing for **journal submission**
- Fostering **reflection** and **self-awareness** for professional and personal well-being
- Supporting **empathic engagement** with patients, learners, colleagues, and self
- Refining **listening skills** to interpret personal narratives
- Developing **leadership skills**, including emotional awareness, openness, and compassion
- Educating about the significance of narrative for **career development**

The NWP contributes to BUSM's strategic research and educational scholarship missions by investing in our faculty's academic development and personal vitality.

## METHODS

We designed and implemented a cohort-based course to help faculty engage with narrative themes and writing skills relevant to their daily lives.

The NWP curriculum includes:

- Experiential literary seminars
- Reflective writing exercises
- Narrative writing workshops

We are piloting the program in the BUMC Department of Medicine from January-June 2018, with monthly meetings held on Thursday afternoons.

## RESULTS

We have conducted evaluations throughout the NWP's conceptualization and implementation.

Preliminary feedback has been positive, with participants expressing increased self-efficacy and competence in writing, as well as satisfaction with the program's provision of a designated time and space to engage in narrative education.

As a result of NWP sessions, participating faculty have expressed various commitments, some of which are included in the figure below.

## EXAMPLES OF PARTICIPANT COMMITMENTS

*Submit a piece*  
*Spend more time writing*  
*Just write and not fixate*  
*Pause more often—and think*  
*Write poems to record difficult feelings at work*  
*Think more about patients' perspective on their care*  
*Think about perspective more when I write*  
*Start writing as soon as possible*  
*Write more and worry less*  
*Value every moment*  
*Read more stories*