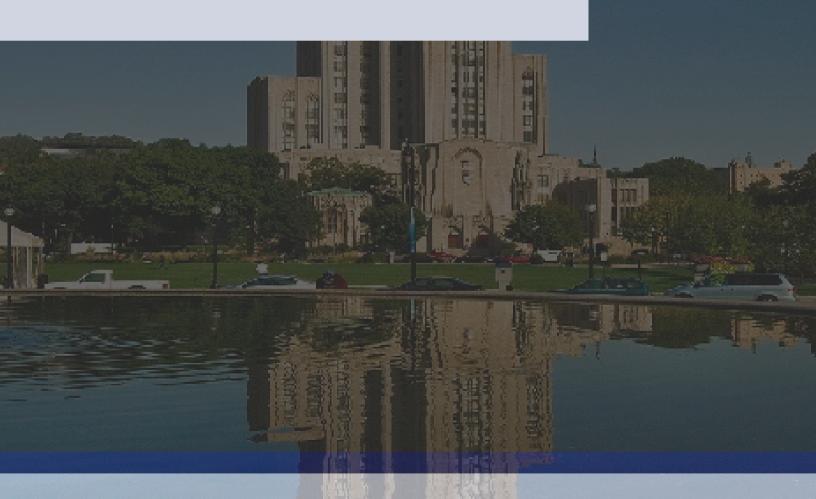


CASE STUDY

Strengthening Faculty
Community Through Writing:
The PittWrites Model







Writing Toward Momentum

At the University of Pittsburgh, writing is more than a task—it's the foundation of faculty identity, influence, and advancement. But like on many campuses, it can easily get buried under the weight of competing demands. In early 2025, Pitt's Office of Faculty Diversity & Development set out to address that challenge head-on—not with a large-scale overhaul, but with a short, structured invitation to refocus on what matters most.

The result was PittWrites: a 14-Day Writing Challenge that **sparked renewed energy**, a **sense of community**, and real writing momentum across the university—and one that faculty and staff are already planning to do again.

A Simple Structure, A Bigger Strategy

Developed by NCFDD, the 14-Day Writing Challenge is a two-week guided program that encourages faculty, graduate students, and postdocs to build sustainable writing habits through daily practice. It's not a bootcamp or a word count competition—it's a focused time to commit to 30 minutes of writing per day, in a supportive environment with built-in accountability. Participants track their time, reflect on their progress, and connect with others on a similar path, often forming new writing relationships that continue beyond the challenge. It's a low-barrier, high-impact model designed to help scholars prioritize writing amid competing demands.

What made the University of Pittsburgh's version unique was that it was a private, campusspecific adaptation of the national challenge. While the core elements remained the same daily writing, goal setting, and tracking—the PittWrites version was tailored for their campus culture. It included a live kickoff event for SMART goal reflection and planning, personalized communications, and in-person touches that created a deeper sense of connection. Participants reported that this made the challenge feel more relevant, more communal, and

ultimately more motivating.

The PittWrites challenge was born out of a clear goal: help faculty feel more supported in their writing and activate the full potential of the university's NCFDD Institutional Membership. Drawing inspiration from NCFDD's established challenge framework, the Pitt team created an experience that felt purposeful, personal, and possible, even for faculty and graduate students with full plates.

Participants left the event not just with notebooks and schedules—but with intention.



Pitt faculty attending the PittWrites kickoff event.

"It Felt More Personal"

Participation in the PittWrites challenge was open and voluntary—but the response exceeded expectations. A total of 132 faculty members, graduate students, and postdocs joined, logging nearly 44,000 minutes of writing over the course of two weeks. While the structure itself was straightforward, the way it was communicated and celebrated made a difference.

Director of Faculty Diversity and Development Lorie Johnson-Osho, EdD, noted that LinkedIn became a powerful tool for visibility and connection. "We had people tagging each other, sharing their writing goals, their progress," she said. "And that helped build momentum."

Participants noted that the local flavor of the program helped them connect more deeply: "The Pitt-focused experience felt more personal than previous national ones," one person shared.

The hybrid design also created space for creative reflection. At the kickoff, one participant wrote a six-letter poem that she kept taped to the front of her writing notebook—a symbol of how the smallest sparks can lead to deeper connections with the work. "I loved the vibe at the in-person events," she said. "I use my notebook for everything now, and I keep my six-letter poem in the front."



132

Challenge Participants



43,969

Total Minutes Written



333

Avg. Minutes Per Participant

Real Progress, Lasting Impact

For many, the PittWrites challenge wasn't just about minutes—it was about momentum, mutual encouragement, and remembering that writing doesn't have to be a solitary act. Participants used the time to finish dissertation chapters, unblock stalled articles, and rebuild a daily writing habit.

"I finished a chapter in my dissertation," one participant said. Another reflected: "It was a good way to kickstart out of writing blocks."

That sense of light-touch accountability also came through in participant feedback. "It was nice to have the accountability, even if it was light-touch," one shared. "You felt like others were doing it with you."

Looking ahead, the team is already planning to bring the challenge back. As Faculty Diversity and Development Manager Monique Smith shared, "We are planning to do another one... there's so much interest in it." She continued, "We're hoping to host another challenge in the fall, maybe with a slightly different format based on what we learned."

A Reflection from Leadership

Pitt's senior leadership saw the PittWrites challenge as more than a productivity initiative—it was a concrete step toward shaping a culture that prioritizes deep, focused academic work.

Provost Joseph J. McCarthy emphasized that writing is central to how faculty define and share their scholarship. "Writing is so critical to the exercise of scholarship at the University," he said. "It's the way we communicate, both internally and globally. It's easy these days to get distracted by the urgent and forget about focusing on the important."

He added that initiatives like PittWrites help faculty refocus their time intentionally: "By having this structured time where you focus on the important activity of writing each day, you discipline your time management across your entire spectrum of responsibilities."

"PittWrites was designed to help (re)connect our participants to one another and to lay the foundation for new relationships and collaborations that would last long after the 14-Day Writing Challenge was completed." -Vice Provost John M. Wallace Jr.

Vice Provost John M. Wallace Jr. also emphasized the program's deeper aim: "Our vision for a customized version of the Challenge—PittWrites—was to leverage the demonstrated effectiveness of NCFDD's platform and tools, tailored to our institutional culture, to not only help participants build a consistent, sustainable writing habit, but also to build their relationships here at Pitt."

He continued, "Aligned with Pitt's aspiration to be a workplace of choice, we understand and value the significance of meaningful relationships at work. PittWrites was designed to help (re)connect our participants to one another and to lay the foundation for new relationships and collaborations that would last long after the 14-Day Writing Challenge was completed."

The PittWrites model reinforced the university's belief that consistent, focused writing time is not only beneficial for faculty but essential to fulfilling the institution's research mission. By carving out space for faculty to reconnect with their scholarship, Pitt is investing in both individual careers and collective academic impact.

A Model for Other Campuses

The PittWrites experience demonstrates how small, well-structured efforts can yield significant returns. With just two weeks of guided focus, the program helped participants build writing momentum, connect with peers, and tap into their scholarship with renewed clarity. Importantly, it wasn't a one-size-fits-all template—it was a flexible model adapted to reflect the campus culture and strategic goals of the University of Pittsburgh.

Faculty development programs often struggle to gain traction because they feel disconnected from day-to-day academic life. But PittWrites worked because it did the opposite: it brought writing back to the center, offering space and structure that faculty genuinely wanted to engage with. The localized approach—tailored to the Pitt community, supported by leadership, and reinforced through platforms like LinkedIn—gave the initiative visibility and credibility.

For institutions aiming to improve research productivity, combat writing isolation, or make the most of their NCFDD membership, the 14-Day Writing Challenge provides a flexible and proven way to get started.

Whether run at the department level or across an entire campus, it invites faculty to recommit to their writing in ways that benefit both individual careers and institutional success — and to rediscover the power of writing in community.

Want to Do This at Your Institution?

We can help you bring a private 14-Day Writing Challenge to your campus tailored to your faculty's goals, your institution's culture, and your calendar.

Make it happen:

- Learn more about the 14-Day Writing Challenge.
- · Connect with the NCFDD team.



PittWrites utilized branded swag to encourage participation in the private 14-Day Writing Challenge.