

Writing for the Future

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Project Budget:

\$14,520

Abstract:

The School of Professional & Continuing Education (SPCE), along with a faculty member from the College of Arts and Letters School of Writing, Rhetoric, and Technical Communication (WRTC), have partnered with Church World Services to create Writing for the Future, a program aimed at primarily benefiting high school students who have migrated internationally to Harrisonburg, VA. The identified high school students, who mainly represent refugee populations, will work with JMU faculty and undergraduate students in small groups and one-on-one to increase their professional writing skills, with particular focus on resume writing, cover letters, reading job ads, filling out applications and applying for college.

The Harrisonburg Immigration and Refugee office has settled refugees in this area since 1988 from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia, Burma, Colombia, Congo (Kinshasa), Croatia, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Russia, Rwanda, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan within a 100-mile radius of their office. Their primary goal is to help refugees form long lasting relationships in the community which become the basis of self-sufficiency.

In order to reach this goal a family must be able to maintain their own basic needs in a sustainable lifestyle. The program provides a bridge from their former life in their home country to a new set of cultural, linguistic, and practical skills that will enable them to be successful in Harrisonburg. The influx of immigrants has diversified our city and our school system a great deal. As a community engaged institution, JMU has an opportunity to play a role in assisting in the success of this ever-changing population, while at the same time exposing our own students to diverse cultures from around the world, and increasing their writing and training skills.

In order for Writing for the Future to be successful, SPCE and WRTC will partner with Church World Services (CWS) who has expertise in working with refugee families, including their high school students. CWS will guide us in identifying students, and in the planning and implementation of the program.

JMU students, via a partnership with the WRTC486: Writing in the Community course, will meet together once a week to explore theories of teaching technical writing and distilling best practices for technical documents and writing in professional spaces. They will also discuss the role of race, gender, socio-economic status, privilege, access to education and employment. JMU students would then meet regularly with local high schoolers to discuss and collaborate on written artifacts that may be used by those students to seek and obtain employment, internships, and/or college admission. The program would also involve JMU Admissions to assist students through the college application process.

As a final project, the JMU students will work with local businesses and employers to host a small job fair for program participants.

This model provides educational experiences for our high school students, introduces them to new career opportunities, and gives them a glimpse into college life. It also provides instruction in writing and soft skills. In turn, JMU students gain experience working in their field, and a unique opportunity to sharpen their own skills by teaching them to others.

JMU students will identify and define technical writing projects and skills common to attaining employment and advancing in their careers; access to employment and/or higher education; recognize a variety of modalities appropriate and required for different writing tasks in the work world; work collaboratively with classmates as team members involved in a large writing project working with, in, and for a specific community; identify ethical issues and concerns related to writing with and for communities; communicate effectively with team members and community partners; and teach others basic skills needed to write a resume, cover letter and other common professional documents.

This program fits perfectly with JMU's vision to become the national model for the engaged university; engaged with ideas and the world. It is a program that will create mutually beneficial partnerships around the city, and will benefit the university, our students, and the community.

Project Budget Amount: \$14,520

Travel: \$630

Equipment: \$9,000

Supplies/Materials: \$3,000

Other: \$1,890

Additional information to explain or expand on budgetary needs:

In order for this program to work, we need to provide transportation to the high school students due to the fact that they would have no way of getting to and from the sessions. For students to participate, they would each need a laptop during the sessions to work on cover letters, resumes, applications, and college applications. For supplies/materials, we'd like to prepare these students for job interviews by providing them with professional attire which students will "shop for" at JMU's pop-up clothing pantry. The \$2,625 under "other" is to have snacks at each of the six sessions and to provide one on-campus lunch at the end of the program.