REPORT OF THE CCCC STANDING GROUP FOR BEST PRACTICE IN
ONLINE WRITING INSTRUCTION (OWI)

THE 2021 STATE OF THE ART OF OWI REPORT

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Jessie Borgman
(Chair of the CCCC OWI Standing Group)
Cat Mahaffey
(Associate Chair of the CCCC Standing Group)
Jason Snart
Jennifer M. Cunningham
Natalie Stillman-Webb
Lyra Hilliard
Mary Stewart
Casey McArdle
Heidi Skurat Harris
Scott Warnock
Joanna Whetstone
(Communications Chair of the CCCC OWI Standing Group)

Report Notes

***This report is titled 2021 because the research and report were written in 2021. Though revisions and edits happened in 2022 and the report was released in 2022, the report illustrates the decade between the initial report (2011) and this report (2021)

***The original working group consisted of 16 people but the survey data and report was analyzed and written by the 11 people listed on the front of the report.

***Special thanks to UNC Charlotte, which served as the IRB of record and hosted the 2021 survey, and to NCTE, which hosts the OWI Standing Group.

***This report exists in three versions: a short executive summary version, a version with the executive summary and results reporting, and a full report including the executive summary, results reporting, and raw data. All three versions of the report can be found here:
https://sites.google.com/view/owistandinggroup/state-of-the-art-of-owi-2021

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Introduction

The initial 2011 State of the Art of OWI report was created by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Committee for Best Practice in Online Writing Instruction (OWI), formed in 2007. (The name of the committee subsequently changed to the "Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction.") Originally a formal CCCC committee (now a standing group), the committee was initially charged by CCCC to complete the following tasks:

- Identify and examine best strategies for online writing instruction using various online media and pedagogies primarily used for the teaching of writing in blended, hybrid, and distance-based writing classrooms, specifically composition classrooms, but including other college writing courses.
- Identify best practices for using online instruction specifically for English language learners and individuals with disabilities in coordination with related CCCC committees.
- Create a Position Statement on the Principles and Standards for OWI Preparation and Instruction. In consultation with the Assessment Committee and the Task Force on Position Statements, review and update the 2004 Position Statement "Teaching, Learning, and Assessing Writing in Digital Environments."
- Share best practices in OWI with the CCCC membership in a variety of formats.
- Identify best practices for using various online media and pedagogies (e.g., networked classrooms, e-mail and Internet-based conferences, peer-reviewed papers) for the teaching of writing with both synchronous and asynchronous modalities while taking into consideration currently popular learning management environments;
- Identify best practices for training and professional development of online writing instructors.

Creating the 2011 State of the Art of OWI report was an integral part of these charges and the impetus for forming the 2013 Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for Online Writing Instruction (OWI), https://ncte.org/statement/owiprinciples/. The 2011 State of the Art of Online Writing Instruction project surveyed 297 fully online and hybrid writing instructors (using two separate surveys) to gather findings about instructor pedagogy, training, supplemental support, and satisfaction as well as experiences with multilingual students and students with disabilities.

A decade has passed since the initial report, and online writing instruction and research in online pedagogy has expanded. The CCCC sponsored OWI Standing Group still operates, and two OWI specific community groups have emerged, The Online Writing Instruction Community (2015) and The Global Society of Online Literacy Educators (2016). In addition, an entire annotated bibliography dedicated to OWI specific research exists, The Bedford Bibliography of Research in Online Writing Instruction (OWI) (updated last in 2019), which boasts over 500 citations (Harris et al., 2019). The field has also faced the effects of the 2020 COVID pandemic, which forced many instructors to participate in emergency remote instruction, including teaching and learning in digitally mediated spaces for the first time. While teaching and scholarship in OWI has expanded over the past decade, there remains a need for multi-institutional, longitudinal research into OWI practices as well as scholarship that is replicable, aggregable, and data-supported (RAD) (Haswell, 2005).

The 2021 State of the Art of OWI report seeks to meet this need and to facilitate the continued expansion of OWI scholarship by reporting on the experiences of online writing instructors. It also compares results reported ten years ago with results derived from our 2021 survey. The report offers an update on instructor experiences, attitudes, and concerns that emerged in a survey of 235 writing instructors/administrators/scholars with experience in digitally mediated teaching environments, including hybrid, online (synchronous or asynchronous), and any combination of modalities, including hyflex.

While the CCCC 2011 OWI survey was developed around the Sloan Consortium pillars, the field of writing studies now has the benefit of writing-specific frameworks, including the 2013 Position Statement and the 2019 Global Society of Online Literacy Educators (GSOLE) Online Literacy Instruction Principles and Tenets. The 2021 survey was thus based on the 2011 survey but also informed by foundational principles, tenets, and best practices for OWI as they have emerged in recent years.

The 2021 State of the Art Working Group

In 2016, the CCCC Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction was disbanded and formed into the official CCCC OWI Standing Group, which continues the valuable work of the original OWI Committee (though, unlike the committee, the Standing Group has no task-oriented charges from CCCC and instead researches topics of interest to the working group).

The OWI Standing Group members include leading scholars in areas critical to OWI: accessibility, multimodal writing, hybrid writing instruction, multilingual writing instruction, user design, assessment, contingent labor equity, teacher preparation and mentoring, program development, and much more. The group's expertise attracts newcomers to our annual Cs workshops and panels. Since cultivating a sense of community is crucial to the mission of advising CCCC members on OWI research, effective practices, and emerging trends, committee members interact during the year through ongoing projects and active working groups.

At the 2021 CCCCs OWI Standing Group business meeting, a working group was formed to create a revised report of the [2011 State of the Art of Online Writing Instruction](#) survey and report, in order to create a 10-year picture of the developments in OWI, including the shift to emergency remote instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020. The 2021 State-of-the-Art of OWI Working Group consisted of the following 15 scholars:

- Jessie Borgman, (Chair of the CCCC OWI Standing Group), Arizona State University
- Cat Mahaffey, (Associate Chair of the CCCC OWI Standing Group), University of North Carolina Charlotte
- Jason Snart, College of DuPage
- Jennifer M. Cunningham, Kent State University
- Natalie Stillman-Webb, University of Utah
- Lyra Hilliard, University of Maryland
- Mary Stewart, California State University, San Marcos
- Casey McArdle, Michigan State University
- Heidi Skurat Harris, University of Arkansas at Little Rock
- Scott Warnock, Drexel University
- Joanna Whetstone, (Communications Chair of the CCCC OWI Standing Group), Lakeland Community College
- Dan Seward, The Ohio State University
- Sushil Oswal, University of Washington
- Joanne Giordano, Salt Lake Community College
- Catrina Mitchum, University of Arizona
- Ashlyn Walden, UNC Charlotte

The members of this Working Group were a diverse collection of scholars who have extensive experience in OWI and Online Literacy Instruction (OLI).

Most of the Working Group members currently teach at public four-year colleges or universities (73%). Two members currently teach at two-year community colleges, and one teaches at a private, four-year university.

Within those institutions, our members bring a range of modality experience.

- All but one have taught **asynchronous courses** for at least six years, and over a third of the working group has 16 or more years of asynchronous teaching experience.
- 80% have taught **hybrid courses** for at least six years, and nearly 10% of the working group have more than 20 years of hybrid teaching experience.
- Ten working group members have up to five years of experience teaching **hyflex courses.**

Working Group members have taught a wide range of courses. Everyone has taught first-year composition, and the majority have also taught research composition or upper-level writing. Group members have also taught developmental writing, literature, creative writing, film, web authoring, technical writing, and several types of graduate-level courses including writing, education courses, and rhetoric courses focussed on OWI.

Working Group members have authored over a dozen books about OWI and more than 80 chapters and articles about OWI and related topics. Their review work spans the major journals in Writing Studies and many of the significant publishers of writing/rhetoric books. The authors of this report have won awards for their publications and work, both on campus and as part of the broader field. In addition, Working Group members have secured nearly $100,000 in funding for various grant projects.

Members of the Working Group have facilitated dozens of faculty development activities nationally and internationally and have themselves engaged in many professional development workshops, courses, and seminars. A number of them created the first online writing courses at their institutions, often taking the lead in also teaching these courses and training the first cohorts of faculty to do so.

Members have served as key leaders in OWI, online literacy instruction (OLI), and online learning in organizations such as GSOLE, CCCCs OWI Standing Group, The Online Writing Instruction Community, CCCCs Committee for Best Practices in OWI, and Quality Matters (QM). Finally, the expertise of the group is augmented by its members' involvement with educational technology projects, ranging from authoring a webtext development project to creating a start-up for securing grants for campus technologies.

Executive Summary

In this section, we begin by revisiting the 2011 report's emergent themes, and then we share the 2021 report's emergent themes. These themes are arranged by category, though readers will note that the two reports' categories differ somewhat. For a detailed discussion of these differences, please review the section below on 2021 Survey Methods.

The 2011 report outlined emergent themes related to each of its six major categories (we quote directly from the 2011 report.

1. **Pedagogy**: Teachers and administrators, to include those in writing centers, typically are simply migrating traditional face-to-face writing pedagogies to the online setting—both fully online and hybrid. Theory and practice specific to OWI has yet to be fully developed and engaged in postsecondary online settings across the United States.

2. **Training**: Training is needed in pedagogy-specific theory and practice in both fully online and hybrid settings, but particularly in fully online settings because of its unique complete mediation by computers. In most cases, it appears that "writing" and how to achieve strong writing and identifiable student results are left out of online writing instructional training.

3. **Supplemental Support**: Online writing centers are not developed by enough institutions to handle the needs of students in both fully online and hybrid online settings. To that end, training is insufficiently developed to the unique setting because it is, as mentioned above, migrated primarily from face-to-face settings.

4. **English Language (EL2) Users**: The needs of EL2 learners and users are vastly unknown and insufficiently addressed in the online setting—both fully online and hybrid.

5. **Students with Disabilities**: The needs of students with various kinds of disabilities have not received sufficient and appropriate consideration in light of writing courses in online settings, although the hybrid setting indicates somewhat of a beginning. Teachers and administrators do not know what they are responsible to do or how

to do it for any particular variation of learning or physical disabilities relative to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or to a particular student's specified needs.

6. **Satisfaction**: Instructors are dissatisfied with the levels of support they receive regarding technology, course caps, training, pay, and professional development/interactions relative to OWI in both the fully online and hybrid settings. Such dissatisfaction can lead to poor teaching, low expectations for students and for an online course, and insufficient retention of experienced instructors at a time when OWI continues to grow.

The 2021 report identifies the following emergent themes:

1. **Pedagogy:** Most survey respondents indicated that the course design process was collaborative, involving an instructional designer, faculty, and/or subject matter expert. More faculty seem to be involved in the design process than were involved in course design processes as reported in 2011. However, fewer than half of the 2021 survey respondents indicated consulting research on distance education and/or surveying students and incorporating their input into course design. These latter two areas could be better incorporated into the course development process; emphasis could be placed, for example, on studying/surveying students as web users in addition to incorporating existing effective distance learning practices as an intentional part of the design process.

2. **Training/Support:** Student resources including tutoring, library help, and writing center resources have increased significantly since 2011, as have modality options (more synchronous and asynchronous classes are now offered). Training and preparation continue to be a problem for instructors teaching online courses, however. Most training still focuses on using the learning management system. Fewer respondents (29%) indicated that they were offered online faculty development webinars or that training was mandatory, which is a departure from the 2011 study which reported that (48%) of respondents who taught fully online indicated some type of mandatory training. Twenty-seven percent of respondents indicated that they did not receive any training specific to OWI. A majority of respondents who did receive training did not receive any payment (59%), which is comparable to the 2011 Report which found that (63%) of respondents who taught fully online did not receive payment.

3. **Access:** More focus has been placed on student access, including access to technology (computer/internet) and access to content (help for students with learning challenges). When looking at other access elements, such as working with students who are non-native speakers of English and complying with ADA requirements for students with disabilities, many survey respondents seemed under prepared. Only (37%) of respondents offered more text-based communication for ESL students, and only (48%) viewed their courses as ADA compliant. These areas need improvement, and emphasis should be placed on training and aiding instructors in creating more accessible courses.

4. **Student Preparation/Appeal:** Only about half of the survey respondents indicated that they prepared students for the commitments of distance education by setting expectations for workload or time commitments. Fewer than a quarter of respondents noted that their institution prepared students to learn in digital environments by giving them any sort of formal training, such as how to use the learning management system. Survey respondents also indicated that they felt that the benefits or greatest opportunities for students who take online courses were location (93%) and flexibility with time (85%).

5. **Instructor Perceptions/Satisfaction:** Respondents indicated "flexibility in scheduling" (77%) and "no commute" (69%) as the top reasons they enjoyed teaching online, while they disliked "dealing with technical problems" (52%) and the added time it takes to prepare online courses. The majority of respondents indicated that they would be expected to provide reasonable support for teaching in online environments (93%), and that they would be expected to develop a sound online course (82%). Respondents also believed that they would be expected to interact with students (69%) and hold office hours (65%). Participants indicated the valued qualities for online writing instructors were:
   - "Willingness to follow-up with students promptly" (79%)
   - "Skills in developing clear sequences of assignments well in advance of deadlines" (74%)
   - "Ability to establish a presence online" (65%)

The survey results indicate that training remains a significant issue, both for prospective online teachers and for students registering for online courses, making this topic a key area for future research. One related issue that stands out is the need for distinctions between designer and subject matter expert. The idea of "design" is often relegated to the domain of instructional designers, suggesting that online teachers aren't able or aren't willing to

claim and/or practice this skill set, despite the fact that (82%) of 2021 respondents identified themselves as adept in using classroom technologies. This likely complicates faculty views of training for OWI vs. training for technologies like learning management systems.

Some good news is evident in the growing prevalence of online access to tutoring and other support services for students. It seems that the call from researchers over the past decade to align access with course delivery has been influential. The bad news is that ADA compliance remains a major concern, and best practices for enhancing success for ESL students need continued attention. Furthermore, expanded definitions of access (learning preferences, content delivery in multiple modes, etc.) remain an area for further focus and research.

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