

# State of the Art of Online Writing Instruction Follow-up Focus Group Transcripts

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## Overview and Purpose

This project consists of seven (7) focus groups with twenty-one (21) instructors who teach online and/or hybrid writing courses. The purpose of this project is to better understand current challenges and potential solutions related to online teaching by creating a space to discuss pedagogical affordances and constraints of online writing instruction with online and hybrid writing instructors from different institutions serving in a variety of roles with different positions and years of experience.

Please feel free to use the following transcripts for your own pedagogical or research purposes to further education and scholarship related to online and hybrid writing instruction. Note that all names are pseudonyms and identifying information (e.g., institutional names and references to states) has been removed.

## Background and Methodology

In 2022, we created an IRB-approved, follow-up survey to the 2021 State of the Art of Online Writing Instruction (SoA OWI) Survey (CCCC, 2021) to help us better understand responses from the 2021 survey and hone the survey instrument for future research. We asked three questions first included in the 2021 survey before asking related, semantic questions. At the end of the survey, participants were given an opportunity to indicate interest in a follow-up, virtual focus group to continue discussing OWI with other online and hybrid teachers and scholars.

The follow-up survey was sent to participants who completed the 2021 SoA of OWI survey and indicated interest in follow-up focus groups. We received twenty-one (21) responses to the follow-up survey with eighteen (18) of those respondents indicating their interest to participate in a focus group. Those eighteen (18) people are the focus of this project and participated in semi-structured and open-ended conversations related to online teaching challenges (Brunk-Chavez & Miller, 2007; Cargile Cook & Grant-Davie, 2013; Hewett & DePew, 2015) and institutional pandemic responses (Krause, 2023).

Participants met in groups of three via Zoom for 45-60 minutes, discussing three specific, guiding questions related to this project as well as any additional topics they considered relevant to OWI:

1. What do you believe is the most challenging thing about teaching online?
2. Have you solved or do you have any ideas or suggestions to alleviate these particular challenges to online teaching?
3. How has your institution responded to online teaching since the pandemic?
4. Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

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## Focus Group 1: Elizabeth, Dayna, & Joy

Facilitator (00:02):

Hey, so you'll get I think that little popup. Everyone's good? Okay, so I'm [the facilitator]. This is the first conversation we're having as part of our OWI standing group, focus group follow-up conversations. I was going to ask you to introduce yourselves, but that seems like stupid given the conversation we just had. So we'll edit this part out of the tape. Will you introduce yourselves though, just for the sake of our conversation? Not as part of the thing. [Elizabeth], will you go first?

Elizabeth (00:44):

Oh yes, of course. Okay. Hello everyone. My name is [Elizabeth]. I've been teaching at [a large, public, two-year college in the Midwest], I think this is my sixth year. And I also teach at [a similar nearby institution], and I've been teaching there for six years. And then this is my first semester teaching at [a nearby medium, public, two-year college]. So I don't know what else you want me to add to that.

Facilitator (01:06):

No, that's perfect. Again, it's more for just our getting to know one another.

Elizabeth (01:10):

Sure.

Facilitator (01:12):

[Dayna]

Dayna (01:15):

Hi, Dr. [Dayna]. I am at [a medium, public, four-year, Southern university], which is a regional comprehensive school in [the eastern part of our state]. We serve a seven county region in [our state and a neighboring state]. My graduate training is from [a large, public, four-year institution in the Midwest] and [another large, public, four-year institution in the Midwest].

Facilitator (01:36):

Thanks. Last but not least.

Joy (01:41):

Okay. And I'm [Joy]. I teach at [a large, public, two-year college in the Midwest], and I teach in both the English and Business Writing. I also teach at another school and I am a corporate writer in marketing.

Facilitator (02:05):

Awesome. Thanks. I'll change your name on this. I just-

Joy (02:07):

Okay, thanks so much.

Facilitator (02:07):

For other folks to remember.

Joy (02:09):

We had some trouble with our computer and I didn't realize that it didn't change.

Facilitator (02:13):

I can't tell you the number of meetings I joined as my wife. Awesome. And so it's not really coincidence that you guys are the three that we're starting with because I know [Joy and Elizabeth] from [our institution] and [Dayna] via the [conference work we do], is that the right term?

Dayna (02:34):

The [position in organization].

Facilitator (02:36):

Oh, okay. Of [this organization], right? No, [this other group]? I get them all blended together. Anyway, we know each other well, clearly, in command of the facts. Terrible.

(02:54):

Okay. So the first question that I would pose to you and anyone is welcome to jump in, is to just talk about the challenges and/or successes related to your current OWI online writing instruction work. We'll edit out the lag time, so it seems like someone jumped right in.

Elizabeth (03:30):

I'm just processing the question. Taking time to process the question.

Dayna (03:37):

I think for me, my OWI work at my current institution, I teach about half online, half face-to-face. And my online coursework, I think of it as the bulk of my teaching is teaching technical writing to non-English, non humanities majors. And I think that the great successes in my work here so far is creating a pretty standardized curriculum, that's rooted not only in best practices in theory and kind of conventions from the field of technical and professional writing. But also in the unique needs of our students. So doing things like building scenarios for the students to respond to that match the distribution of majors in my school and in this program.

(04:29):

So we are regional school, we have a lot of applied engineering students. So we don't have just an engineering program, these are the students who be like between the folks on the line at the assembly plant in Honda and the folks in the cubicles right at HQ, they're the kind of middle men. And so, building scenarios that match their needs, as well as needs of students and disciplines like exercise science and wellness, emergency management, occupational safety and health.

(05:00):

The challenge, of course, in meeting the students where they're at, is that we have a student population that's largely either non-traditional first generation, working multiple jobs to go through college and can't dedicate the amount of time to a three credit hour, 16 week course that is required of it. And then when it's online, they think it's going to be easier and it's actually more work. And so creating a lot of pushback and resentment on the student population and also difficulty that everyone across America is seeing right now. And things like reading and comprehending instructions, following basic instructions, doing things that we think of as very fundamental and they just can't manage paragraph breaks. So it's the twin tensions and successes of meeting or trying to meet students where they're at and then them continuing to struggle even though we're trying to put so much in to make this responsive pedagogy.

Joy (05:59):

I think my successes have been that I try to really teach to the course objectives and really offer them lots of opportunities to do research, kind of slightly creatively. Certainly encourage them to explore our library, even when it's on an online course. Really encourage them to do critical thinking and those sorts of things.

(06:31):

Some of the challenges that I've had is that no matter how much I write or even give videos on how to do simple work cited listings and it's so easy to find this information on the library website, I still get things that are really not correct. I have students not putting them in alphabetical order, not knowing how to do in-text citations, even though I post models. I do everything I can and explain it over and over again, fix it on papers. So some of the challenges is I found students kind of do things the same way. They're not here for learning, they're here to just do what they've done before and just turn it in again. So those have been some of my challenges.

Facilitator (07:23):

You find that that problem is unique to online instruction, is exacerbated in the online environment or is really across modes?

Joy (07:34):

I think it might be exasperated, but I do find that it happens in the classroom too. But for some reason, I seem to be able to get the point across a little bit better in the classroom than I do online. Even though I do everything almost the same. I find I'm posting everything, even on the classroom classes. I'm posting everything as models and things like that on Blackboard, week by week, just the way we would do it for online. But I find somehow I'm just not getting the message across for these things and some other things. I mean, just simple using grammar check or using the databases as opposed to the website. I mean, they seem to be, I don't know, almost challenging you. Well I found this, but I know it's on a database, but I found it on the internet, kind of thing.

Dayna (08:30):

I think part of the problem is that we're operating at an empathy deficit online and students can't see our faces or our personalities as well. So we're not as human to them. So they feel comfortable saying things that they wouldn't say to us face-to-face. But we also don't have the opportunity to justify to them as much why we do, as we would in class. And also strike the fear of God into their hearts, the way that I can with a withering stare, encourage my students to read in the classroom, I can't do on the internet. It's not physically possible with the technology we have in the year of our Lord 2023. So I totally feel that, Joy.

Elizabeth (09:16):

I was going to say a lot of the same things that Joy was challenged by. I think I recently wanted to have a library day with an online anytime class, I think this has been the most recent thing that got under my skin. There's usually one thing, that there's a point in the semester, so I have an online at anytime, [course number] with the students. I took a poll and I said, what would be a good time for you guys to have an online live library section? Because I really wanted to work with[...]our librarian here, and I find it the biggest success.

(09:51):

We do it's called chasing citations where students use references and bibliographies to find and lead you to better sources. And I had no students show up for the first time this semester and I was like ... my blood was boiling. We all are like, "Ah, I set aside the time, what happened?" And instead of that, I

propose a new time for students. And so there was kind of a, oh, we didn't know you actually meant we should do this. Or whatever it was. And that led into the next assignment of we're having trouble citing, we're having trouble finding things in the databases. And so it kind of spiraled and so we rescheduled. So, I'm hopeful that that will be something better.

(10:38):

But also a success in online anytime courses right now I'm working with [the facilitator] on a separate project, we're doing like a grant project. And I'm having online students ... I'm doing what's called Think Aloud. And students are vocalizing their writing or their thoughts. And I think a lot of students that take online anytime classes, much like [Dayna] mentioned this, it's easy for them to hide behind things. And so they're having to share either videos or voice recordings as the class progresses. So they're not just engaging in discussion boards, it's we're putting a face to you, a voice to you. And I found this to be a really big success. I was genuinely worried because I thought, oh my gosh, there's so much technology. How do I model it in multiple formats so it's easy? Or for students that don't have a smartphone or students that are really technologically challenged, how do I make this accessible for them? But it's actually gone very well. I'm very happy with that.

(11:46):

But I would say researching, I think [Joy], I think I have some similarities. It's very easy sometimes in a classroom to go to a whiteboard and say, okay, well what do you think about this? Or raise your hand if you have a source that has two authors and you can write it. Versus online, you have to anticipate more of those questions as you create curriculum. So I continue to think about the questions. And I think online anytime, Zoom, are you there or not there? Hybrid. Okay, where did you do your homework? But you didn't show up to class, I think they all have challenges. So I the Think Aloud has been a really good thing for so many students. I will say I had three students drop when they were like, oh, I don't want to talk to people, like no way. But it's been so good, so I think that's been a major success this semester.

Facilitator (12:43):

Can you talk more about how you did model possibilities for students doing that? And whether they did run into any technical challenges? Because my experience is that I keep anticipating that students won't know how to do this or we're going to spend so much time on the technical side, we almost forget about the content side. And every once in a while that happens, but by and large like people do video now. They screen capture, it's just not that big a thing anymore.

Elizabeth (13:22):

So the first week, I took a poll and said, how comfortable do you feel with technology? Do you feel comfortable recording yourself, video or voice? Because I did send out an email before the class started saying they were going to be required to have recordings, voice or video. And then the other part is, a lot of the assignments ... the first one I did, it didn't go as well. Because I found when they went to submit it to Blackboard, they could do the recording, but the clunky part was Blackboard only allows you to submit so many formats. So that was a bit of an issue, so I had to figure out what type of file Blackboard would do. I think if I were to do it over, I wouldn't necessarily use Blackboard as the submission place. I don't know how ... I haven't worked that out. Yes, they're clunky with Canvas and Blackboard and all the different ones.

(14:15):

So what I did this last week, which I thought was a little bit better, my [course number] had to talk about ... they had to pick two sources off of a working bibliography and they had to talk about them. So I had them write it first and submit that on a Wednesday. And then the recording part, they didn't have to submit till a Friday at midnight. So if they felt like they could reference that, they didn't read

directly from it. But I just said, I want you to talk about the source. Well, you've already read it and wrote about it, so you should feel comfortable talking about it. A very basic thing.

(14:50):

And so this last week I gave them the option, you can just voice record, you can video record because we've done all. And then I just do a quick little like, here's how to record yourself using Audacity, Screencast-O-Matic, here's your phone. Most of them I find just a video, upload it to YouTube and just send it to anyone with a link and view, boom. And that way it's only the people that they allow to get that link. Some of them choose not to upload to YouTube, they just send me a direct file. And so I think that that's been a really good way. I just do a little tutorial and then a step-by-step screen-shotted list of instructions, which takes time. But I think it's been helpful. I don't know if that answered the question.

Facilitator (15:42):

So unless there are other thoughts along the success challenge line, we could transition to our next question, which I'm realizing might actually elicit many of the same kinds of responses. How, if at all, has your OWI, your online writing instruction changed over the last ... we'll say a few years, whatever you kind of think of as your recent history. Maybe including impacts of the pandemic on you or your institution. And maybe this, again, takes us back to ways of humanizing the class of anticipating because we don't have immediacy, as [Elizabeth] was saying.

Elizabeth (16:20):

I think for me it's creating a community. It's focusing on the classroom being somewhere that's accessible and students can answer. You don't have to say, okay, I have office hours from 12:00 to 2:00 and nobody shows up. Let's do something in the class where you introduce yourself, a quick little 90 second video, where are you in the college career? Or you ask them some sort of question and then every single week they continue to build on that. I think thinking about new technologies, like a simple Google portfolio for even just an [course number] basic comp one class A, let's do portfolio. So that way that personalization is still in there and they could still be them and have that kind of identity. And then also, they get to incorporate writing, write their writing in it every single week.

(17:13):

I think also just for me it's the constant like I used to think years and years ago when I was a kid, I like, oh gosh. When people write online, it's just like, oh, they just post the instructions. No, they need a video and they need to be able to watch it or interact with something that keeps them going. And they need to be forced out of their comfort zone. So I try to force them a little bit with assignments each week further and further outside that zone. And teach them that if you just want to check a rubric box, that's probably not my class. I'm not a rubric person, so I'm upfront with that. I've moved away from that a little bit over the course of the pandemic. Like [Joy] said, trying to do different types of assignments versus the traditional paper. Let's do this digital thing.

Dayna (18:17):

I think that zooming out from my day-to-day online teaching to talk about the philosophy of that teaching and where that teaching fits into my workload and the amount of resources and time I have to give. I feel like there's been kind of like an arc from before the pandemic, when I started teaching online in 2017. I was at [large, public, four-year institution] and we had never had an online first year writing class. I made the first one in 2017 and piloted it. And at the time, we had to do a lot of justification as to why we wanted to make this class. Oh, it's important to have for accessibility, for international students who have problems with their visa and can't get into the country and have to drop their first eight weeks of classes and they can pick up an online class in the second eight



weeks. Or for injured athletes who can't travel or bear weight to be able to take classes from home. We had to make all these justifications for why we need this class, why we need to design it.

(19:21):

And then three years later the pandemic begins and all of a sudden like we don't have to justify the existence of online education anymore. The need for it is very clear and made very clear very quickly, and it's very clear for a couple of years. And now it's coming back around again, where I have to continually justify why we need more online classes for our students and our students are asking for them. But the administration at my current institution is not giving them because they're like, we're a face-to-face institution, we're a residential institution. We need to have face-to-face classes. The registration was this week and I was on Yik Yak, the social media app, watching the students complain because all the online sections filled up immediately. And so the students who are disabled and needed them, couldn't take them. Or students who need them to fit in their schedule, couldn't take them. And the students are asking for more, but administration at all levels, departmental, college and university level are all like, no, no more online classes, the pandemic's over.

(20:18):

And so that's impacting the students in my class and the availability of the classes. But as for my day-to-day teaching work, I think I'm doing a lot more satisfying now. I'm not doing the innovative pedagogy thing anymore because I'm not a grad student teaching one class a semester. I'm on overload teaching five courses at a regional school with higher course caps and untenable service load. And so, it's all about giving students all the tools they need to succeed in multiple different formats and then just plug in and chug in. I do use rubrics for grading everything because I do not have the time or the resources or the mental energy to give point by point comments anymore, unless students request them of me. I'll give feedback on a draft and absolutely do that. But when I have 40 students across two technical writing sections and they all turn in a project, I'm just plugging and chugging in the rubric.

(21:11):

The other thing is working on positive conditioning to get students to do what I want them to do. Because they're as burnt out as we are and so things like watching my videos, they would not watch my videos if I didn't incentivize them so heavily. I found out that maybe 10 to 20% of the students were watching my lesson videos. And so I started putting little extra credit Easter eggs in them, every third video partway through and be like, "Hey, if you're watching this, good job doing what you're supposed to be doing to succeed in the class. Send me an email with a TV show you think I should watch and I'll give you five extra credit points." And I did that for a while and it kind of boosted, but not above the 50% mark. No more than like 40% of the students were watching my videos.

(21:48):

So I made a syllabus quiz at the beginning of the semester and in the syllabus quiz I went through a calculator the past several semesters. Students who watch the videos on average get a 94% in the class. Students who don't on average get an 82%. And I had that as a syllabus quiz question. If you can't see the benefit in watching these videos for this class after this, then I can't do anything to help you. So doing this behavioral conditioning and things to incentivize students to do what they really should be doing anyway is the biggest change, I think, in my work.

Facilitator (22:19):

Does it feel positive or negative to you?

Dayna (22:22):

It feels like it's mixed, it's mixed. It's a really good question. Because at once I'm like, why aren't you doing what you should be doing already? What is wrong with you? And at the same time, in my time

and I'm not teaching, I'm a researcher and I research generations and technology. And I'm really big on not demonizing a whole generation. Anytime anyone was like, "Oh, these lazy Gen Z students, blah, blah, blah, blah." It gets me really mad, like I break out into hives. And so I try to come at it from a perspective, they're overwhelmed just like I am. They're burnt out just like I am. In fact, they probably, in some cases, work harder than I do because they're working multiple jobs, paying for school out of pocket to have care-taking responsibilities. I too wouldn't want to watch 15 minutes of me a week if I didn't have to. So it is frustrating and I do get resentful sometimes, but then I also try to have some humanity about it. So it's very mixed.

Facilitator (23:17):

Yeah, it strikes me that some of the threads that I want to connect are like comments about students seeming to want more of that net or more of that online option. And I think we see a lot of that at our college, too. And yet, do they want it for the good reasons that we hope that they want/need it? Or is it just like, oh, not only do I not have to go to class for 50 minutes three times a week, I could even skip the 15-minute video and still get fill in possible letter grade here. So I'm torn by that.

Elizabeth (24:00):

There was an interesting conversation I had with [a coach], I'm sure us that teach at [this institution] know who she is. And she was talking to me about, I had a few students in my online class that were athletes, particularly basketball players, and they had to sit out the first game. So when we do roster verifications, one of those students come to find out the star basketball player at the school found his taking my class unbeknownst to me. Hey, I get a panicked email from the coach, the person, hey, why was so-and-so dropped from your class? So you get three variations and you're navigating this. And long story short, [the coach] told me, hey, so many athletes are opting for online classes. Why do you think that is? And I thought that question was so profound.

(24:56):

So, oh, they can do their homework on the bus when they're on their way to the basketball game or the football game. But are they getting anything out of that? Are they going through the motions? What is that space? And so that student and I had a very ... I mean, I re-permitted the student into the class, but I had a very serious email chain back with him. In a research class, I'm demanding more of you each week and you've missed the first four conversations. So while I want to give you credit, we need to still get that material into you. So now you're going to have to do more work. But research is often harder when you don't engage in content or you don't show up to that library session or you do the same motions that you were doing as a high school student. It's kind of marrying that idea of, I'm asking you to do things that you've never done before. And you have to be okay with doing them and being able to sit down and find a space that's quiet.

(25:59):

I also take a survey during my online classes and I ask students, what is the hardest part about being an online student? By far and large, number one is not procrastination, it's finding a quiet place to do their work. And I find that so profound because so many students, like [Dayna] said, they've got multiple jobs. Some of my students are working two and three jobs and they're helping take care of their younger siblings or an ill parent or grandparent. And so I find in the chaos of my own life, with a season of my life with so much going on, that I'm like, am I giving them exactly what they need? How do you find that balance?

(26:42):

And I find it very interesting because us in our English department [at the large, public, two-year institution], we don't do live online anymore on Zoom or whatever platform. And at [the other similar institution] where I teach, we do. And I find that those classes, depending on how you set them up,

they work really well. Especially for research, they're going very well. So I wonder what the difference is. And obviously, it varies, students, group of students, instructor. So I find it so interesting and I question why do students take online classes? Are they convenience? Are they because, oh, I'm telling mom and dad, I'm taking college classes, but I can do whatever I want. But I'm not allocating for time for work. What is that? I don't know.

Dayna (27:33):

In particular with athletes too, we're so pedagogy focused in writing studies, we're so focused on helping do whatever we can to make students succeed, and to succeed in the process of writing to appreciate it. But like I want to hold athletes accountable, but I don't want to be the person who turns the Eye of Sauron at the athletic department upon me. Especially being untenured at a school where football is king, the last thing I want to do is make the football coaches angry and become their target. Which sucks. It sucks it has to be a consideration for me. But when football is what brings in money to your school and is the large focus of the administration's efforts because of that, I can't hold them accountable. I can't fail them. I can't. If I did, it would be bad things for me and my career.

Elizabeth (28:23):

I think I try to level with students and say I was a college athlete and say, I understand the demands are different for everybody that's involved. Being an athlete or being a member of whatever it is, committee or group. I hold you to the same standards and it's one of those ... I mean, I had a coach when I was in college that would go to teachers and threaten them and say like, "You need to let my athlete play." And I remember professors boldly standing up to them and saying, "What are you here for?" And I was like, wow, they did that. I mean, I'm not that harsh, but this is what the student has or hasn't done.

(29:06):

And I'm glad I don't have that pressure. I don't think we don't draw a huge ... I mean, yes, there're students that ... there's quite a few students that play sports. But I tell students at the same time, sports might be something that drives you, so you have to think, how do you match that? How do you find the time? I mean, I had hours of study tables and I hated it. Because sometimes I didn't want to be there, I wanted to be sleeping or eating like a normal person.

(29:36):

So I think it's a challenge that we face and even more so students that struggle with mental health, that conversation has been going on. And I have a student that a couple years ago during the pandemic was like, I can't be here. And I was like, yes, the pandemic brought a whole new wave for all of us. And there's still some students that are just like, I don't want to take an in-person class, I have anxiety, et cetera, et cetera. So navigating an online space with access and accommodations at different schools has brought new challenges, I would say, as well. It's been something that I've been trying to navigate well. And some schools are more responsive than others, some are less responsive. So it varies so much in that regard.

Joy (30:24):

Well that is true.

Facilitator (30:35):

All right, by way of conclusion, unless [Joy], you wanted to speak a little bit to how you feel like your online writing instruction has changed over the past few years, if you feel like it has. I'm sure that it has to some degree.

Joy (30:48):

Oh, it certainly has. I mean, I try all sorts of things that I never tried before. So anything to try to ... and I feel the same kind of being torn between understanding students, but also wanting to think that this is a learning experience, and that you should be learning something. So I feel the same way about what people have said.

(31:14):

It happens in the classroom, too. But here again, I guess that there's more back and forth and you can really understand the problems. I never give incomplete and yet on my last online class, I gave two just because I got these desperate messages from two students. So I think that there also is the tendency of students feeling that they can't finish during the time for a multitude of reasons, health reasons, things like that. Where in the classroom, I don't know, I hadn't given an incomplete for years and years and years.

Dayna (31:51):

I think that speaks to a conversation that I tried to have with our disability resources director recently. He's a friend of mine because I do some disabilities studies work in my pedagogy and my research. And so, we're often looking like characters on *The Office* when we're at university-wide meetings, looking at each other across the room and just giving that face of, what? When people say things that are very ableist, like breaking the fourth wall. Because folks will often bemoan over kids these days and talk about them and their inability to sit still or whatever.

(32:27):

But I posed a question to him and I don't think either of us have the very good answer at this point of, how do we make accommodations but also help facilitate what we call executive function? So the ability of students to schedule or organize to be self-directed, to break down projects into chunks. Because I'm very flexible with deadlines and I say that with students all the time, if you have a problem, I much rather you turn in something a couple days late than turn it in on time and half-baked.

(32:59):

But I don't know where that line is where we're just giving students, particularly neurodivergent students or students with neurodevelopmental disabilities, like me, I have ADHD, I'm not motivated by anything but an external deadline, enough rope to hang themselves with. To think about how do we cultivate that executive functioning and then we'll also being accommodating and giving them reasonable accommodation per our obligation to federal law to the American Disabilities Act. And also like, to just an equitable pedagogy. I don't think there's any real answer to that, it depends. But it's a thing I've been thinking about a lot lately.

Facilitator (33:42):

It feels like it, it's so often just like case by case. And then you're trying to guess at what the right accommodation versus enabling unproductive long-term habits are. So you're actually part of the problem, not the solution. But you're never quite sure.

(34:05):

Okay, so let's maybe conclude with any thoughts that you might have to elaborate on or things that maybe we didn't cover. And I would even somewhat direct the question because this is a larger sort of state of the art of online writing instruction project. Do you feel connected to the field of online writing instruction? Or how do you perceive that? Or what could organizations do to facilitate people feeling more connected, having a voice, having agency?

Joy (34:46):

Can I start?

Elizabeth (34:48):

Yeah, [Joy], go ahead.

Joy (34:49):

I feel that the schools you work for should have continuing education and maybe they do and I'm missing it. But I try to go as many seminars and things like that that I can. Continuing education of different things that we can do for online. And even, I'm teaching two hybrid courses this semester and yeah, I know what I could do for hybrid. But I wasn't really even given any direction or suggestions of what people usually do for hybrid. So I just made it up myself, and then I did ask at a meeting, I said, well, what do you usually give as assignments for hybrid?

(35:28):

So I think that continuing kind of suggestions from the organization that you work with, would be very helpful for me. I really do. Because otherwise, I am kind of disconnected. I mean, I'm an adjunct, so I run to the school when I'm doing it. But I also try to attend meetings, but I would like to have continuing online discussions about what sort of things people find helpful and what new techniques we could be using. Because I do feel on my own, I try to be understanding, but I do want to keep the rigor of, I don't know, I do believe in education.

(36:11):

I just heard on the news yesterday where people going to college is down 15%, they want to be apprentices. Who are you going to be learning from? I don't know. I've been in the corporate world my whole life and to tell you the truth, some of the people in the corporate world, I couldn't really learn from them. Even people above me, they really didn't have the skillset nor the patience, nor the time to ever really educate me the way education has educated me. So I believe in education. And I want to feel that my students are getting something besides just a diploma or whatever they're getting from what I teach.

Elizabeth (36:54):

I was going to say something similar to [Joy] because I think every institution treats online differently. And so in doing that, I know [the facilitator] during the pandemic, how different courses that we could take. And I found those so helpful because the content was helpful, the shared space was helpful, and so many of us as adjuncts have great ideas, and everybody across the college has these great ideas. Like [Dayna] said, we're so pressed for time. I got to get that thing graded, I got to get that student that feedback, I got to create that content. And we all have lives outside of that, as well. So I think some of those challenges exist. Being on different committees, I try to do that and hear what other people are doing or saying or researching. And I always find it profound. We all have these great skills with no time to share it.

(37:47):

And so demystifying what online means and continuing to hold a space for what that looks like. And also for students, they don't think they often know what they're signing up for. I think they think, oh Zoom, it's optional, or oh, my internet went out. It's like, well, not every day. And sometimes I'm like, well. So it's finding that middle of the road and myself, my fiancé has a business where people are in an industry, he works in the faster industry. And there's people at 71 years old that he's like, please don't retire because nobody is going into this industry to make tools like a specialized thing. And so we often have conversations of, and I want people to go to school because I love to teach them. But at the flip side it's, well, I need those people in the industry and yet they don't want to go. So where

are they going? Where are they in the world? I'm like, where are they? So it's funny, what skills are students looking for? Is my question always. What are they looking for? So, I don't know.

Facilitator (39:04):

That almost brings us full circle to where [Dayna] began with your discussions of curricular redesign, that reflected what students might be interested in. Whether it's an academic pursuit or ultimately that professional pursuit, kind of marrying those tubes, so-called opposites, but in a way that's productive for both.

Dayna (39:24):

Maybe I should publish that stuff. I don't know.

(39:27):

I think for me, I do feel connected to the field. I hold a leadership positions in one of our organizations, though. So if I'm not connected to the field, I guess that's a problem. But for me, I am at a university with really good Continuing Ed both online and face-to-face teaching. So we have a [name of faculty development office], which is our unit for professional development for faculty, and then online at [my institution], which is our unit that does certified online instructor training and webinars and all stuff like that. So I have that pretty well covered here at my place. But I'm tired and burnt out and my weekdays are just full of stuff. So I want remote, asynchronous resources, is what would benefit me the most.

(40:13):

Things like recorded lessons or quick tips. Resources like the PraxisWiki, which I'm going to put in the chat if you haven't encountered it before. It's a publishing avenue, but it's not as peer reviewed as a journal, put together by Kairos, which is one of the journals in digital rhetoric. And the PraxisWiki just has teaching and research tools developed by people in the field. So when I was designing our online freshman writing class at [a large, public, four-year institution], I knew I wanted us to do an infographic activity, but I never taught students how to make an infographic before. And there was a page in the Praxis Wiki someone put up about how they taught infographics, and I used it to design our assignment. Infographics or tip sheets about particular teaching tools or styles or techniques would be really cool. Static things that I can read on my own time, save to my to read list or take a screenshot of and look back at later.

(41:06):

Or a repository. I know that [the facilitator] knows my mentor from [the large, public, four-year institution], who puts together the [online resource]. It's password protected, so we'd want one, but it's probably more open. But [online resource] has hundreds if not thousands of assignment prompts in syllabi and stuff just available. Something like that would be really useful. So in addition to these remote and asynchronous resources, the other thing that would help me feel closer to the field or to professional organizations is to see advocacy documents. Things like position statements like the C's and the MLA put out.

(41:45):

Recently we were talking, we're building a union at my current school and we were talking about salaries. And someone dropped in the MLA position statement on salaries, which I didn't even know existed. I didn't know that my professional organization says that I should be starting at a salary of \$83,000 a year, which just made me laugh and laugh and laugh. Because I teach at a rural school in [a southern state], the state that's 52nd in the nation for educational funding behind all other states and DC and Puerto Rico. So to see twin resources for teaching and then resources for helping us to be the most materially supported teachers that we can be. So that our institutions know the

importance of what we do, the labor that goes into it and stuff like that. That would make me feel closer. But I already feel pretty close. I'm already at a good level, this would be exemplary.

Facilitator ([42:38](#)):

Thanks for the links, too. Does anybody have any final, again, thoughts, ideas, feelings about OWI? I mean, I assume it would be something that we all are invested in continuing to do, but is anyone questioning that? Or do you see a bright future for it? Quite the opposite.

Dayna ([43:07](#)):

I think I would be questioning it if I was in a different place in my personal life. Teaching half my classes online affords me a lot of flexibility to arrange my work how I want. And I have a partner who lives a hundred miles away, so I do a lot of time commuting and spending time with him to try and cultivate that relationship. So being able to not have to go into campus five days a week and teach four classes per week, three credit classes face-to-face, that's a real blessing to me. But I think that the burnout that I often feel from this difficulty of teaching online could put me in a different place if I were not so lucky to have that flexibility.

Facilitator ([44:01](#)):

Okay, well, unless there are other thoughts, thanks for your input. I'll stop the recording here and we can kind of debrief a little bit if anyone has thoughts about our thoughts, so to speak.

## Focus Group 2: Samuel, Lynn, & Kevin

Facilitator (00:01):

So you'll probably get the little this is okay to record deal. And [Kevin], I'm not sure if you were here when I mentioned it, but just to reiterate, yes, we're recording, or yes, I'm recording, but the video and the audio, the whole recording is not ever going to be a public document. We're having it transcribed, and everyone will be de-identified, and if you mention your institution, that's de-identified.

(00:25):

So again, really encouraging people to be honest as far as the good, the bad, and the ugly as we have our discussion here because none of it is going to be ascribed to you or made public in the video or the audio, just so you know. Okay. So I can get us going. Does anybody have any questions or anything that's on their mind before I launch us into it? Okay. So the first question or maybe prompt, and this can go to anybody who's interested in taking it up, is to reflect on or talk about challenges and/or successes related to your current OWI work. And that, again, is open to anybody. Challenges and/or successes related to your current OWI work.

Samuel (01:25):

I usually wait for silence-

Lynn (01:26):

I mean-

Samuel (01:27):

... and then jump in. Oh, [Lynn], good. Good. Take it.

Lynn (01:31):

I can talk. I mean, I don't know if this is useful or not, but at my institution, we've been able to create a pretty robust, at least online first year writing program that is pretty well integrated with our larger first year writing program. So when I got there in 2015, we were just offering the occasional online class to meet, because the institution was developing a bunch of online programming, and so they needed gen eds to meet those requirements.

(02:12):

And so they had adjuncts doing whatever they could to meet those needs. And so we've created a pretty robust program, which I've been happy with, but as part of that, I've also seen, especially since post-COVID, the people we have teaching the classes feel less engaged and seen it as easy. And so they don't have to invest as much time in those online classes, especially since we do a lot of the initial legwork for them, with the understanding that they'll be using that time to really engage with students and look at student writing.

(02:55):

But that hasn't necessarily always been the case. Especially in the last year, we've actually had two different online instructors, both who were grad students, just up and leave in the middle of the semester, which has posed some real issues, and kind of ghost on their students too. So there's a perception that they can ghost on those classes and it won't hurt those students in a way that it would hurt if they ghosted in-person students. So we're thinking about ways to change that perception, but that's our next, I feel like, challenge.



Facilitator (03:32):

Yeah. That's really interesting.

Samuel (03:40):

Okay, so I will say a couple of things here. So easy to lean on challenge, but I'll start with success. Like one of my colleagues here, I think 2016, maybe 2015, I started out hybrid, and I was fully online before there was a pandemic and feeling pretty good about myself and how I was doing it. And I'm going to name what makes what I do so success, and it's that I use an external app, you probably know it, Eli Review, and I could not be doing this without Eli Review.

(04:28):

I could not have done it at first and could not have made it through the pandemic and do it now. And my colleague just spoke about engagement, and with this app, the engagement is constant. The engagement is week by week, and that has to do with the curriculum I set up, but they are always engaged and the app forces me, the instructor, to be engaged. So I am engaged, working with them, seeing their work. I mean, it's like a real class, but it's asynchronous. Okay, so I went to success. By the way, I'm looking at my screen because I wrote down the question here.

(05:08):

Challenges. I think the biggest challenge I face is an institutional barrier attitude that has grown up since everyone returned from the pandemic. Oh, I forgot to say one thing. During the pandemic, I never skipped a beat. We took one week off when the lockdown commenced, where people reorganized their lives, and then we were back to it because when the lockdown happened, well, the routine had already been established. Gave them a week off and we continued on.

(05:48):

Okay, so things were going really well. My institution has privileged in a very big way onsite learning, and this has a lot to do with certification. And I don't know the ins and outs of that, but they face, the institution being the they, they face losing certification if they don't have a certain percentages of courses onsite. And so the pressure has been intense to not teach online, to not have online courses. I became lucky. I'm watching my words here because I know about the recording. I became ill, not with COVID, but an illness, the medication to which left me immunocompromised.

(06:45):

Because of that, I got disability accountability, meaning that I did not have to return. They could not force me to return as they were forcing many, many instructors to return. So I remained online, and things are going well. But that challenge is this attitude that online doesn't work. And I'm going to end here and turn it over to my colleague who hasn't spoken yet. I'm thinking about what our first speaker said about engagement and what happened online. And a lot of, I'm doing air quotes here, bad things happened in remote teaching, and there's an attitude that, therefore, online is bad.

(07:38):

And I confront that. And I don't know that if I had received the disabilities accountability... The words aren't coming to me right now, but if I had not received that, they'd be forcing me back. Whereas I know, and I looked at the report today, it's writing about writing, but not writing about writing, but online fosters this engagement with you are writing all of the time. And folks don't see that, and there's a lot of tips and tricks that go on.

(08:13):

I'm going to stop myself because I know I could say a lot about this. What we do is not tips and tricks, but my institution tends to think that that's what happens online, that, to rephrase my first colleague, the first speaker, that it's easier to teach. Good God, it is not easier to teach. You can delete the good God part from the transcript. My third colleague, I probably took too much time there.

Facilitator (08:45):

That's okay. It's interesting. Before we do turn it over to [Kevin], one of the things that immediately struck me, but I didn't weigh in then, [Lynn], when you were speaking, was, if I heard you correctly, a fairly good integration of online first year composition with first year composition. And I couldn't give you statistics to back it up, but that feels to me like quasi-rarity, right? Because we usually have this east is east and west is west kind of feel to it. [Kevin], did you want to jump in?

Kevin (09:18):

Yeah, sure. I mean, definitely I could go on a whole tangent on how the pandemic has shifted attitudes to education in general and how that's affected online classes, but that's not what I wanted to talk about. I'll say that in terms of successes, I feel like in 2022, 2023, I'm in the groove for OWI. I feel really good about the courses that I and my colleagues, but I'll just speak to myself... I feel like the courses that I'm delivering are effective, that they work well for students. I won't say, "I've got it figured out," but I feel like I've got some things figured out.

(10:09):

And so that's really good. I feel really good about my online teaching. I feel pretty good about the online program that I'm part of. So our tech writing minor is fully online, but you can do some of it face-to-face, but then it's in the context of a mixed modality BA and all that kind of stuff. Definitely some of the challenges are the value mode confusion from the institution, which [Samuel] was just talking about that, which is that our institution is really... I mean, all institutions want to improve facilities and buildings and all that kind of stuff.

(10:55):

We're in an especially weird place because we're literally on an island, so we're landlocked. We have no room to expand, so the politics of real estate on our campus are extra weird and crazy. So room usage is very important. And so I definitely feel like the push to have onsite classes and how that's affected online classes and how that's affected teaching loads and the delicate balancing act. I'm also the coordinator for the writing studies program, so I do the schedule and I do rooms and I do all that stuff. And so I definitely feel the calculus of all those things.

(11:38):

At the same time, the university has embraced online programs, and they're great and they're fantastic and they're wonderful. Our Bachelor of Applied Sciences degree, which has a lot of my classes, a lot of my colleagues' classes, tech writing and writing for the web for this stuff, they're moving to a competency-based education model-

Facilitator (12:03):

Ooh.

Kevin (12:05):

... which is great because it's trying to get returning students or professional students to be able to fast track some components of their education and be able to let them check off credits for things that they are able to do already. And so I'm good with CBE, and I am traditionally an asynchronous online teacher. My courses are traditionally asynchronous and have been since 2016, at the same time as we're writing up our materials for shifting it over to CBE and not knowing how the labor on the other end is going to work out. So these are going to be special online classes for special categories of students on a different timeframe, on a different model, with a different structure.

(13:01):

How is that going to affect... Am I like writing modules that I'm not actually going to teach? And how is that kind of engagement? And some of the good things that we know we're supposed to do in online writing pedagogy, how much of that is built into the structure of my materials that I write, and how much of that is in the interactions that I'm able to have with students? So that's the challenge, is figuring out the role of courses, programs in the broader institutional setting as we're working out that weird embrace of online programs.

Facilitator (13:42):

Yeah. I mean, I have a million questions about the competency-based part, but we'll leave that aside for now. That is a perfect segue, though, to my next question. The final question I ask will be just an open-ended, do you have any thoughts, so if we're not covering where you would hope this would go, there's totally opportunity for that still. But my next question or prompt is... And I'll just read it, but then I'll provide an addendum here. How, if at all, has your OWI changed over the last however many years you think in terms of, including impacts of the pandemic on your institution?

(14:19):

Although my research colleagues and I kind of hesitate about that little pandemic caveat because that can send us down a very narrow wormhole very quickly. And to some degree, you've already mentioned some of that stuff. So even though the question might sound more looking backwards at how things have changed, given the conversation so far, I would actually really be interested in folks talking maybe about where that looks like it's going in the future per [Kevin's] discussion about reconfiguring not just classes, but classes to fit within this very different kind of programmatic model. So again, I'll just reiterate. How, if at all, has your OWI changed over the last few years, however many years you think in terms of? Again, open-ended to anybody.

Kevin (15:18):

I'll start, I think. One of the ways that it's changed, and I'll probably think of other stuff, so don't count me out, but I think one of the ways that it's changed is, on top of building... I'll say a corpus, building a corpus of materials that I can pull from and mix and remix and not just assignments and descriptions, but media and all those things. So one thing that's changed is, obviously, over not quite 10 years, I've developed a lot of material that I'm able to remix, and so that's been a benefit for my teaching because I think it's become a lot richer.

(16:12):

At the same time, when I think about video, and when I first started, I would have these long, ridiculous weekly videos where I would just talk about everything and then realize that I was going to have to do that now every semester because none of that content was evergreen except for little tiny bits and pieces. And so thinking about what parts of my teaching can be evergreen and what parts of my teaching must absolutely be designed in the moment, responsive, engaged with students. And that's one way that it's changed, is it's a lot more evergreen, but I also think that it's a lot more connected to students. I still do weekly stuff, but it's much shorter. It's very compressed so that I'm not spending tons and tons of time on that, but I'm still able to have a pretty good read about what students need.

Facilitator (17:14):

Can you just explain your use of the term evergreen in this context?

Kevin (17:17):

Evergreen just means the difference between if I have a video where I'm explaining, where I'm going over what we're doing in the week in that class, well, I might change the assignments next semester,

or I might mention... One thing that I did early on was be like, "Oh, well, here's something that Steve said in this post, and it was really good and I wanted to comment on it. And then here's something that Julie said in their post and I wanted to comment on it." And then, well, next semester you don't have Steve and Julie.

(17:47):

So as opposed to short videos about introducing concepts or a short slideshow that introduces a project that I only have to update a little bit from year to year as opposed to something that I would have to shoot the whole thing or recreate the whole thing just because the dates are changed. So that stuff that I don't have to update as much is evergreen.

Facilitator (18:18):

Gotcha.

Kevin (18:19):

Right? I don't have to go back and re-edit it heavily, whereas this conversation with these people in this moment and this time about this class is not evergreen. That's going to be one shot, and then once the class is over, that video is no good. I think the other thing is, and this is probably an impact of the pandemic, is my online teaching has become both more structured and more flexible. And some of that is just structures of how to build in structures considering ableism and anti-racist pedagogy and some of those conversations that have become very important in the last number of years that were then turned up to 15 in the pandemic. And so I'm able to build in flexibility in ways that I hadn't in the beginning, where everything was very structure over everything. And students appreciate structure, but obviously they need some flexibility. Those are all my comments for now.

Lynn (19:32):

I'll go next. And some of this will be kind of building on what [Kevin] said. I mean, just as far as broad overall changes, my first online class was in 2010, which was very early in the world of online teaching, I feel like. And that was with expectation of synchronous learning, and that just did not work. The technology wasn't there. It was a summer class with the expectation I'd have international students coming in. I mean, internet connections in Hong Kong and China and Indonesia, the lag time, it was awful. So that experience really soured me on synchronous learning.

(20:18):

And I was like, "I feel like it's not necessary in a writing class anyway," because in my in-person classes, I want students to be doing a lot of writing anyway. It was like, conversation's good, but writing about writing is even better. And so I very quickly shifted to asynchronous. And then with the pandemic, a lot of my colleagues, they, again, have this notion that teaching needs to have a synchronous component.

(20:51):

And so I also, again, went through this whole thing where trying to push them and encourage them to think about how they can use the synchronous environment to their advantage. What are the unique affordances, the unique capabilities of the online environment that are distinct from a face-to-face environment, and how can we really utilize those to do something maybe different than we do in the face-to-face or the in-person classroom? So that's one thing really broadly speaking. Also, with [Kevin], my classes have become both more...

Facilitator (21:33):

Uh-oh. Speaking of internet connections and lag time.

Samuel (21:48):

Frozen. I often wonder if the person frozen knows that they're frozen.

Facilitator (21:57):

I think it usually becomes pretty clear, but hopefully... We may see her disappear and then come back into the Zoom. Fingers crossed. [Samuel], did you want to just jump in and we'll wait till [Lynn] returns to us, hopefully?

Samuel (22:10):

Sure. And then if she speaks over me, I won't feel like it's a rude interruption at the table. And I'm happy that from the first time that I talked, I have permission... There we go. It's going to happen, and then I'll stop. I have permission to say people's names now because it feels much better knowing you're going to delete them. Should I wait or pause a moment, or-

Facilitator (22:35):

I would just go for it.

Samuel (22:37):

Okay. And as I said, I no longer have that 9:30 meeting I was going to have before. It's 10 o'clock now. My biggest changes... And I'm thinking about [Kevin] right now. I'll go into one of them. Oh, we're back. Sound?

Lynn (22:59):

Sorry, guys. I don't know what happened there.

Samuel (23:03):

Something happened.

Lynn (23:04):

Yeah. I think my internet cut out.

Samuel (23:04):

Do you remember what you said last?

Lynn (23:06):

I'm sorry about that.

Facilitator (23:07):

I think you ended-

Lynn (23:08):

This is why I don't like synchronous classes.

Facilitator (23:09):

We were joking that you jinxed-

Samuel (23:10):

That's it.

Facilitator (23:11):

... yourself with the lag time.

Lynn (23:13):

Yeah, right? So where was I talking when I disappeared or when I froze?

Samuel (23:16):

It was, you don't like synchronous.

Lynn (23:18):

Oh, okay. There we go. Yeah, I've been talking for a while. So yeah, I've been spending a lot of time thinking about and also encouraging my colleagues to think about, "What can we do in an online environment, asynchronous environment? How can we use those tools? What are the unique affordances, unique capabilities of those tools that we can do something different than what we do in the online classroom? Instead of replicating what we do in the in-person classroom, how can we imagine that space as having its own unique things?"

(23:50):

So that's sort of very broad and very long-term for me. Also, I'll echo what [Kevin] said in that my classes in some ways have become more structured, but also more flexible. For me, I think the big shift in the pandemic was really not just being flexible, but being very conscious about announcing that flexibility to students. And that's also something that I've been trying to do more of, and I think that going forward I will be doing more of.

(24:29):

I mean, I'll back up. Accessibility is a big part of my own pedagogy, and it's really important within my institution because we've had a bunch of lawsuits. So accessibility is really at the heart of... There's an institutional mandate for it, but also, it's important to me as a teacher. So I've been thinking about accessibility a lot in terms... Whenever I do videos, they have to be closed captioned. Whenever I provide multimodal content, we need to provide in a different way to make sure that's accessible to students with impairments.

(25:02):

But I've also been thinking a lot about how to make my courses accessible to students who are neurodivergent. I have friends and colleagues who have been thinking a lot about the relationship between neurodivergence, specifically ADD in online learning. And so trying to think about and be conscious of the ways in which I structure my classes to meet those students' needs in addition to the students who really need structure and really function well with structure. So that's something that's been shifting for me. I'll stop talking and let someone else jump in.

Samuel (25:45):

That will be me. And while you were gone, I had just started to say, because I was going to fill in for you, [Lynn], that I feel that I have permission to use names now, that the first time I talked I didn't realize I had permission because [our facilitator is] just going to cut them out. Feels much more natural to just talk. The changes I have made over the years have really been curricular, that have been pushed by being online. And again, to recall, I use this third-party app, Eli Review, and Eli

Review pushes certain changes. So it's like my use of two different technologies forced me to rethink how I taught from when I was an onsite teacher.

(26:48):

Okay. So the first one is writing constantly every week in small bits. I don't even know what the word essay means anymore. By the way, [Kevin], I'm a first year and second year research writing kind of thing. I don't even know what essay means anymore, and my students don't either. Everything is small bits of writing with very focused work every week. A huge change. And it started with labor-based contract grading, but I rejected the, in a way, model after trying it out.

(27:21):

But ungrading is a phrase that I prefer. And I've given student agency over this. It might fit into the competency-based a little bit, [Kevin]. I don't know enough about it. But with grading declarations, which students use, they answer true or false quiz questions at the end of every week that they accomplished X, Y, and Z. And I have some of the competencies, I'll use that phrase, it's not what I call them, but embedded into the true or false.

(27:55):

"I wrote 300 words. I gave X number of words in feedback to my colleagues, to my peers," whatever. So those are two huge changes that I call curricular changes that were fostered by technology changes that I found myself in that had huge impact. I mean, when both of those came in, one year I did small bits. The next year it was changing, dumped the grades, we'll put it that way, each time. Real big changes with engagement. [Kevin], when you were talking, I wrote down a little note here. I also really do not have long videos. In fact, I have a personal rule, and the personal rule is that nothing I record is ever over four minutes, and I strive for three minutes. And I hit it, and I hit it really well.

(29:03):

In terms of accessibility, [Lynn], I learned very early, so this is not a big change. I did this right away because I'm not very good extemporaneously. I script. I script. And it's pretty cool because the script is right there on the screen, and you're looking at your script and reading your script and acting natural, and they think that... It's scripted. And then I take that script and I put that up along with the video. I have two kinds that I do. [Kevin], thank you. I keep hearing the word evergreen. I never knew what it meant, but I just act like I know what it means.

(29:38):

But I have evergreens. I'm going to use it now. I'm going to say it. I have evergreens, which is introducing my tasks. I'm really confident of the actual curriculum that I have, the prompts. I don't change very much anymore. And every week when I'm introducing what they're going to do next week, I have three minutes of, "Here's what you're going to be doing. Here are some things that previous classes have had trouble with." Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. With Eli Review, and it's set up very well to do this because there's a lot of good analytics, and you see all the comments in there, I do debriefings.

(30:21):

So I have my evergreen videos that I can just put out without changing, but the debriefs, which are also three minutes, is I can go in and I can grab what Eli calls an exemplar, which are nominated by the peers. And we'll look at it, and I'll spend a minute or two talking about why. "Yeah, I agree that this is good, and here's why I think it was good." And then I'll look at something that was a common error that week, a common something every week. And these debriefings are regular, and they're three minutes. And I put those up.

(31:01):

You prompted me on that, [Kevin]. I'm looking at my notes again. And a big change that I have learned the hard way, I call them nudges from the book, Nudges. My students receive a message from me every weekday. I make sure that they don't see them on weekends because I don't want them to get the wrong idea about what's going to happen. But the nudges are very brief. We use Canvas. It's through the Canvas system. They'll get it as an email. "This is where we're at now. This is what is due tonight at 11:45. This is what you should be working on."

(31:43):

Because especially in the pandemic, I didn't do this as much because I didn't need to, but they're overwhelmed. They're overwhelmed. The cognitive load of every class being online, of 100 things, of working jobs and their grandmother getting COVID. They needed that, and I realized that very quickly. And so the nudge is, "Here's what is due. Here's what you should be working on now. You got two days to be working on this. It will be due here." Friday is what I call revision plan day. It's the day that I give individual feedback to every student, and that will come later in the day.

(32:27):

And I've learned that those emails, I release them at the same time. It's something I learned. A certain type of email goes out at 8:30 every morning. They're going to see that. The Friday email comes in at 3:00 because I'm spending my day doing that, and so there'll always be a little kind of personal thing in there about, "Oh, well, it took me a little longer than I thought today, but here I am. I'm finished with your revision plans. You can go back and look at them."

(32:57):

And the last part, and [Lynn]... I wrote notes as everyone was talking to remember myself. That's why I look down here. You helped me with this. I have a system I use called the bellwethers. Bellwether one in my class, they don't need me, really. They are fine. My bellwether twos, they're also fine, and they might need to check in every so often. Bellwether threes are struggling, but they haven't given up yet, so I focus more on them. And what I call... It's my... Well, it's not my system. I learned it from someone. Bellwether four, they were threes and they've given up.

(33:40):

And I write individual, very compassionate... [Lynn], the word compassion when you were talking came in there. Very compassionate messages letting them know that I see, that I'm there. I know something's going on. It's something like, "I can realize we all face a lot of obstacles in our life. I'm [inaudible 00:34:03] right now, and I really want you to succeed, and I know you can succeed in the course. And I would love to have a conversation with you." And I invite them into that Zoom conference onsite. If I can get them in a Zoom conference, I know that they can become bellwether three again.

(34:22):

And I learned in my little system that a four doesn't move to a one in my semester. A three doesn't move to a one. But if I can get everyone to move up one level, if I can get a struggling three, in my terminology, to move into two, I am happy as can be. You know? You know what I'm saying. You're both nodding. You get it, so I'll stop there. So the changes... How can I summarize that, [Facilitator]? Maybe you can summarize better. It's technology, being an online asynchronous teacher, and this thing, Eli Review, changed my way of thinking about pedagogy. And then I made pedagogical changes in response to the environments I found myself in. That covers it, right? And [Lynn], I've become much more compassionate with all of this. Okay, that's my thing.

Facilitator (35:25):

Part of what I'm hearing, and this isn't meant to summarize by any means, but it's an interesting example of what seemed to be the contradictory notions of a more flexible, but also more structured approach, and I think we're all there and feeling that as it develops. And [Kevin] has just chatted out,



people first, technology second is kind of a version of... I wonder if over the years, things have become more structured, and for me personally, they've become decluttered. My early online classes, if I ran into any article or any meme or any whatever that was tangentially related to what I was interested in, into the LMS it went, so it's just piles of stuff.

(36:10):

But it didn't really serve the students because they couldn't separate what was actually important, even though I knew, from the clutter that I had piled in there. So my courses over the years, and I'm hearing this from different folks, have definitely become more structured, and that, for me, has been cleaner. I've identified the things that are high impact and valuable and kind of jettisoned the rest of it. So whether that's structure exactly, or just, again, a decluttering of the class, and yet more flexible in terms of the people first and the compassion mentality. So sort of like a tighter ship, but more room for the people to move on it. I don't know. Inventing the metaphor as I [inaudible 00:36:55]-

Kevin (36:54):

Yeah. When I do trainings, I don't do a lot of them, but for online teaching, I'm like, "Well, one of the things you'd have in your course is good practices, an orientation video that's not about the class, but that's about the LMS, whatever [inaudible 00:37:16]. And that's totally separate from... So what I always do, is I always have, "Here's the thing that introduces you to the course, and here's the thing that introduces you to the technology," and those are separate. And I think you're right. The streamlining of making the interface not simpler, but more accessible-

Lynn (37:39):

Yeah. I've been thinking about it in terms of-

Kevin (37:43):

No, it's okay. Let's that part not be the hard thing. It's still there. So it's all about... But then the actual parts of the class that need to be hard... I'm wrapping up grading today on my senior level editing class, and the technology wasn't the hard part. Learning to edit should be the hard part, not learning to use Microsoft OneDrive. So yeah.

Facilitator (38:07):

Okay. [Lynn].

Lynn (38:07):

Yeah. I mean, I've been thinking about it, especially since the pandemic, because this language was introduced to it, but about managing cognitive load, thinking about, where do I want students to be putting their energy? And for me, I mean, the OWI principle about not using technology unless it's necessary has been huge for that, because people keep throwing all these new tools at me, and I keep being like, "I don't want students to have to learn a new tool unless it's going to be absolutely essential to the class."

(38:34):

I don't want students to have yet another messaging system. We use Blackboard. They already have to go to Blackboard. I don't want to have them go to a fifth place to do their work, especially if they have all of these different classes. So anyway. So managing that cognitive load and thinking about where the energy is going as a whole. And yeah, I love that idea of the hard part being the part that should be hard.

Facilitator (39:03):

Yeah.

Samuel (39:03):

[inaudible 00:39:04].

Facilitator (39:04):

My research group, and I'm sure many others, maybe you guys too, is really turning to that sort of user-centered design, user experience perspective. And it sounds so simple to say, but so few people seem to be thinking in these lines. Your student is your user, so what is that user experience like, and are they searching all over the place for where you've buried five folders deep something that's really important for them to find and you've made it impossible, or have you designed with your student user in mind?

Samuel (39:35):

Or with [Lynn's] point and yours, [Facilitator], let's try to do next week's assignment with Padlet, shall we? And everyone goes into meltdown. [Lynn], I wanted to add on to what you just said, was something I think about a lot, that I'm not the only thing in their world, and I might not be all that important, and that there are four or five other instructors who might be overloading them.

(40:09):

When I started thinking about that and some instructor putting them on Padlet and Google Docs and something else, and I thought, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. I need to rein it in." And that's where, [Facilitator], like you, I jettisoned so much. And I could probably run my whole course on Eli Review now, except I need a way of letting them know how to get there and to message them. But yeah, [Lynn], when you were talking, I was thinking, "No, no, no. What about those four or five other professors?" And the students say that. They just say, "I am so overwhelmed." Anyway.

Facilitator (40:53):

Well, [Samuel], I see your note about time, and we are kind of at our time, but I did want to throw out my last little prompt here. Super fruitful conversation and discussion, and I love it because I know it's good because I have more questions, not fewer now. But I did want to open it up. Are there any general thoughts OWI-related about the past, the future, your individual work, things that we have not really touched on that you think are important in the field or emerging in the field from your perspective, or that need to be in the field that aren't?

Samuel (41:31):

Oh. See, that last one is what I have. I've thought about this a lot, and I have no answer, so [Facilitator], you and your research team will have to answer it. But I think the OWI community needs to think about or needs to address what happened in the pandemic. And I think that these beliefs that the three or four of us feel very strongly and that I love it... In the groove. We're in the groove, to use [Kevin's] phrase. We've taken a hit in terms of what online learning is and how it can be fruitful.

(42:17):

And I'm probably speaking from just what I face on my own campus, but it's like the privileging of onsite and high level administrators, campus president saying, "No, we need everyone back on campus." And the answer is no, because online still works for the reasons we know, the students who need the flexibility, the students who have long commutes, who have these jobs, blah, blah, blah. I can go on and on. That's my addition. The field maybe... We. We'll be we with that, because I'm part of it. We're part of it. But we need to address what happened and how we now are no longer the cutting edge, but the problem. I feel that I'm perceived as the problem.

Lynn (43:08):

Interesting. I've had a different experience in part because we don't have those same pressures. I don't think there's a requirement for us to have a number of [inaudible 00:43:21] onsite. I mean, at my institution, we're all about just trying to boost enrollment in any way we can, and online students are seen as an easy way to do that. Whether the students are being prepared is another set of questions. But I do think that there's been a shift in perception about online learning. Some of it's true, but everyone's now an expert on online learning. Everyone before the pandemic... Students had ideas about what it looked like. They now have different ideas. But do those ideas match up what's happening in my class? Not necessarily.

(44:06):

So I think that managing perceptions and the continuing importance of training and providing resources to those instructors is continually important. One thing that, and maybe, [Samuel], this would be a conversation we could have in the future, but that I've personally been trying to think about is how to introduce something like engagement-based grading to first year online writing. I've tried it in upper division classes, but the online class, integrating it with an LMS became really tricky.

(44:46):

Especially, it was great for those bellwether ones, but it was really hard for those bellwether threes and fours because they were already struggling just to manage the course content, and then understanding how something like engagement-based grading worked when they didn't have the time and the energy to put into that, they just were extra confused and just kind of ghosted on me. And so I have real reservations about introducing that in a first year writing class where students are already dealing with a lot of... I mean, our institution is 40% first gen, so we have a lot of students who are already really struggling with just the transition to college and are often under-prepared for college.

(45:38):

And then introducing different ways of grading and not having a person there to explain it and to walk them through, and having all that be mediated for technology, I mean, I really understand the value of that, especially as an anti-racist pedagogy. But I'm not ready to do it in the first year writing class given our students yet, especially given that most of our classes are also being taught by first year GTAs who have never experienced that as teachers and who are still figuring out how to teach. So I'm just like-

Facilitator (46:12):

It's hard to ungrade before you've even graded, right?

Lynn (46:13):

Exactly. Right? And it takes them a long time to become... So I want to do it, but I'm still figuring out what makes sense for my students. I mean, the way I'm thinking about it is I'm trying to figure out how to do it in my upper division classes where I have more experienced students, and then figure out a system that works there and then begin to think about how that might work for my first year students, but I'm not there yet.

Samuel (46:44):

If my proposal gets accepted for Spokane, we can have a four-way sit-down coffee and I can tell you what's going on in my space.

Lynn (46:52):

Excellent. Yeah. Yeah. I'd love to hear it.

Kevin (46:56):

Yeah, I'll upvote all those things that you just said, [Lynn]. I think about lots of things when I think about OWI in the future. One thing I think about is how teaching online... I recognized this especially after the pandemic because of all the conversations about what needs to be and why we need to be here and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And it's really made me think about the affordances of the classroom in a way that I hadn't before, the physical co-located classroom.

(47:31):

I have long tried to be intentional about modality and why we're using this technology to learn these things instead of this. And yeah, definitely early on, lots of technologies when really, today I just use Blackboard and maybe one other thing to try to keep it simple for students. So I'm more intentional about that now. And I think the modality piece is a thing that I'm thinking about more and more, and I think more and more about how we train or how we don't train online teachers to be multimodal designers, to be web writers, to be web designers. And I think that's a really important piece.

(48:11):

And I know that's a piece, [Facilitator], that was coming out of y'all's study results, is people were starting to point to that, and it's not something that we've had a chance to talk about, right? Because the flip side is, so much of the technology that we're using... I mean, we have LMSs that can do all this stuff. We don't have to be designers to put online instruction up, but if we want to create learning experiences for our students that are rich and valuable and that they're going to be able to learn in, that's an extra layer of expertise that really makes a difference in their learning. So I'm very much thinking about how we prepare online teachers or how we think of online classes as web spaces and multimodal web spaces, and not just a delivery system for writing instruction.

Samuel (49:14):

And this, to your point, [Kevin], relates to what [Lynn] was saying about everyone's an expert now, so everyone knows too much.

Lynn (49:25):

Or they think they do, right?

Samuel (49:26):

There we go.

Lynn (49:28):

I mean, there's so much I don't know, and I've been doing this for 13 years. So you dip your toe in and you get a certain level of comfort. I mean, I think that's good. I think it's okay that people have these experiences, but also, the person who's been doing this for so long in me wants to say, "But that's not all." It's like going to one class and thinking that that's the end all, be all of in-person learning. In-person learning is an incredibly rich and varied experience, and online learning's the same.

(50:07):

I love the idea that was coming up about thinking about... This goes back to user design, but thinking about, what does it mean to think of the online classroom as an actual environment? Because I think thinking of it as a webspace, that sort of gets at that thinking of, what is this actual environment, and what are the different affordances of this environment, and what does it mean to shift that

environment, or how can we tinker with that environment or hack that environment in order to achieve what it is we want to achieve in that specific class?

Facilitator (50:42):

Yeah. Or even proactively ask our users what their experience of the web design is, I think [inaudible 00:50:50]-

Lynn (50:49):

Yeah. I'm getting all these ideas. I should really just do a survey of my students with like, "Did you find these things that I put in the class?" I'm like, "Yeah, I should really do that." It hadn't occurred to me, but... Because I tinker with the layout and with links, and I'm like, I should really like, "Did you know that these things were there? Did you find them?"

Kevin (51:09):

Yeah. It occurred to me that I should just run a SUS, a standard usability scale test at the end of every class as part of the whole evaluation packages. "Oh, by the way, here, evaluate the interface." Which I try to do, but yeah, it's all there. So yeah.

Facilitator (51:29):

Well, awesome.

Samuel (51:29):

I want to say before I hit the leave button, because I have to go to another meeting, I have loved this conversation. And [Kevin] and [Lynn]... [Facilitator], knew you before, I guess, but it makes me want to go back to a conference or have these kinds of non-campus conversations. This has been a great conversation, so thank you for the opportunity, [Facilitator].

Facilitator (51:56):

Yes, well said.

Samuel (52:00):

I had to say that. I know you have-

Facilitator (52:00):

[Samuel]

Samuel (52:01):

... an ending.

Facilitator (52:03):

Speaking of, I will stop our recording here just for my own benefit.

## Focus Group 3: Barbara, Brynn, & Helen

Facilitator (00:06):

And then again, just for sort of our informal sake, as you know, I'm [the facilitator]. I'm one of the project managers from the original report, the follow-up survey, and now I'm leading the charge with these focus groups. So I teach at [a large, public college in the Midwest], which is a fairly large two-year college in...a suburb of [a large city]. So that's where we're at right now. I'm also part of GSOLE, which is the Global Society of Online Literacy Educators [and] the OWI standing group, which is kind of the Cs group that is the survey or the work group for this and for the report previous. So that's me. [Barbara], did you want to introduce yourself?

Barbara (00:51):

Sure. I'm [Barbara]. I'm at [a community college in the South]. We have about 18,000 students and are a Hispanic serving institution. And my title is coordinator of... Education. Coordinator of assessment evaluation, and I'm in institutional research. I also co-chaired the Institutional Effectiveness Committee. And I'm working right now on our strategic planning. So it's been interesting. I teach as something that I really want to do in addition to my full-time job. The teaching is something I do separate from my main position at the college. And I teach solely online right now.

Facilitator (01:54):

Gotcha. [Brynn].

Brynn (01:56):

Hi, I'm [Brynn]. I am at [a large institution in the South]...We are a four-year private nonprofit. We are also a Hispanic serving institution. Let's see, what do I do? I'm the assistant director of our writing and communication center. That is my full-time position. We offer online synchronous and in-person sessions to students across the university. We are predominantly graduate, which is interesting. So we have a lot of medical programs and the healthcare sciences here. So we serve a lot of those graduate students in their residency applications, their MSPE applications, all of that fun healthcare stuff.

(02:52):

In addition to my full-time work, I'm allowed to teach as an overload up to two classes [here]. So I do teach predominantly asynchronous. So a few classes here and there, trying to become a full-time instructor. I'm working on that. But I also serve [in a leadership role for] GSOLE like [our facilitator]... And then I also serve [in a role for] the Online Writing Center Association, to give myself that continued professional development in not only writing centers, but also the online space as well. So I think that is it. That's all we were introducing. I know it's like a mouthful.

Facilitator (03:41):

That's good. [Helen], how about you?

Helen (03:44):

Yes, and I don't know if you can change my name on Zoom to actually put my last name on there. But I'm [Helen]. I teach at [a very large, two-year, public institution in the Midwest]. [It's] is a huge community college system with, I think, 18 or 19 different campuses. So we have a centralized system, but then individual campuses. And our online offerings have really exploded in the past few years. And maybe the pandemic gave it a little bit of an extra jet fuel boost. Locally, I'm a department chair for World Languages and Student Success. So I'm an English professor by training. But for the

statewide system, I am one of the people who helps develop and mentor a lot of our online classes. So I work a lot as a course developer. Now I'm underneath the instructional designers. I'm a content expert. So that's my role in developing these classes.

(04:47):

So that's what I do for the online world. And so I've been teaching predominantly online, in fact only online since before the pandemic. Because as a department chair that fits into my schedule very well. So haven't been in a face-to-face classroom in a long time. But I am very interested in improving online teaching, which is a challenge with this behemoth, with this statewide system, and with these classes that are developed by these developers who get directions from committees on what needs to go in the class. And then everybody teaches it.

Facilitator (05:28):

Well, what a great group we have. And actually, that's a perfect segue. And you may want to just re-say or expand on what you were talking about, [Helen]. My first prompt for us is precisely that, your general perceptions of challenges and successes related to either your specific online writing instruction or however that configuration happens, or maybe more broadly, programmatic departmentally cross campus, [Helen], if that's kind of how it unfolds. Did you want to maybe say more along those lines?

Helen (06:01):

Oh, I could go on and on.

Barbara (06:04):

Start the recorder. Start the recorder. She's primed and ready to go.

Helen (06:09):

Yeah. Well, our institution feels like it's really an outlier. We're so huge, but we have the standardized system. And it's had a lot of bumps in the road because in the early days when these courses were developed, then it was, you can't change anything. Everything's all got to be exactly the same. And there were a lot of problems with the classes too, but you couldn't change anything. And I think I got involved early on because I naively was thinking, well, if I develop them, at least there won't be any misspellings in. So I wanted to be involved so I could help make them as quality as they could be since this was the way things were going. And it used to be that the statewide classes would compete with locally developed online classes. But we're not allowed to do those anymore. Everything has to go through the statewide system.

(07:02):

There's been a loss of academic freedom for instructors that really like to teach online. They have to teach now with the courses that were developed for them. But now the shift has gone towards telling instructors, "Well, you have academic freedom now to change your standardized course," which many people do. I mean, I do that. I wrote the standardized course, and then I change it to suit me. So a lot of people do that. And a lot of instructors though also don't do that, especially if they're adjunct because it's so much work then to rewrite a course, but keep to the same point structure and the same assignments, but just change all the prompts.

(07:42):

And so we're in this kind of weird limbo of, it's standardized, but you're strongly encouraged now to change it. And so why not let us just write our own gosh darn classes? But that's the solution we can't have. So I don't know. So that that's a problem with the whole academic freedom issue is a problem. And I think that studies have been done that those instructors who are more engaged, who

do more changes in their classes, tend to have more successful student success outcomes. And instructors who just get the standard thing and just run it on autopilot, and don't tend to have less student success. We have seen that. But I'll stop there.

Facilitator (08:34):

Wow. Yeah. So challenges, successes, [Barbara] and/or [Brynn]. Do you want to jump in?

Brynn (08:40):

I was going to jump in. Sorry, [Barbara]. If you don't mind.

Barbara (08:43):

That's fine.

Brynn (08:43):

Because [Helen] said something that the crux of her situation. I actually don't have experience even as an adjunct because I have a very close community relationship with the department that I teach for, separate from my writing center duties. They gave me academic freedom to do. That department does not have standardized shells or standardized assignments. The first semester I ever taught it was introduction to speech. And the first semester I ever taught it, I did inherit someone else's course, import from Canvas from another course to this one. And I was like, I don't really know what I'm doing, so I'm going to leave the bare bones here. But I will ad lib on the fly as necessary to invest to my students. And that worked well. But time was obviously an issue, was not on my side with a full-time job being an adjunct. But I was able to then take the feedback I had from students, take my own reflection of the semester and be like, okay, I'm going to put the time and effort into revamping this course to be mine. And I did that.

(09:57):

So then the next semester I changed a lot of things as far as assignment structure, and points distribution, and percentage distribution rate. And then this fall, I'm teaching it again and it's all asynchronous. So I easily put it on autopilot. But this semester, I took all of that one step further for the very nominal fee that I get paid. I'm spending my summer, I chose a totally new textbook to go open access. I have very strong beliefs about open access resources for students, especially at the undergrad level. And then I am revamping all of my content. So I think I've been very privileged in that way. And I know that, that I didn't get a standardized course that I'm not able to change. And I know that I am eventually going to leave [my current state] and I won't have that luxury.

(10:55):

But I do think it's really interesting from my teaching perspective, the three years that I've been teaching at the college level, that I've been given a lot of agency. Probably more than I should have had as an instructor. But I do have the support of my department, I have the support of my colleagues. I mean, the support I have at [my current institution] is endless. And it will be a sad day when I have to leave because leaving that is probably going to be the hardest thing. But at the end of the day, I do think it's given me a lot more understanding of where I come from and what's out there.

Facilitator (11:32):

So in your iterations then, it doesn't sound like you've done a ton necessarily. And [Helen] talked about actually having the research to show that the courses that have been modified or are more personality driven, they tend to show greater student success. Have you noticed that at all, [Brynn], or even your personal success or satisfaction improving?



Brynn (11:54):

I would agree from a student perspective, because I'm also... I probably should have mentioned this, I am coming up on my candidacy for my PhD. So I am a student and I am an online student just by way of my own making. Wasn't supposed to be that way. At a different institution, actually a state institution here in [the South]. But I find that when professors do have their classes on autopilot it's very obvious. I can tell that the announcement that you wrote, you just updated from the last iteration. And it does make it feel very impersonal. Some supplement very well, and they engage with discussion board posts, they engage with any issues with assignments. And I think we're all guilty of that, importing from other classes and doing that. But I think making sure that you are going through with a fine tooth comb and assessing what needs to be updated before day one of class.

(12:51):

But from an instructor perspective, I think, again, I think I'm very privileged. We have a very high set of standards in our department for our students. In my speech class specifically, I taught a persuasion class twice. The first time it was hybrid because it was during COVID. This time it was asynchronous. And that was a big shift for me, and I really struggled with that. So I can speak to that too a little bit. But I did find that my hybrid iteration, the textbook was wrong. It was terrible. The students hated it. We modified that on the fly. And then it was two years later now that I've taught it again asynchronously. And again, I put a lot of heart and soul into it last summer to make it what it was this winter, changing the textbook to open access. I still had to do a lot of supplements.

(13:45):

But the students recognize the work, I think, that I put in. But again, I think that's because I give off that like, this is for your benefit. I'm doing this to recognize that there are different learning styles from of students. And I attribute a lot of that learning to OWI scholarship that I studied in my thesis and my masters program. And all the GSOLE webinars that I've gone to. All of the OLI certification modules that I went through, I do have that certification. So I think all of my training and education up to this point has allowed me to learn from the community and implement that in a very... Again, because I have that agency, I can implement it very quick. And I find that I do have really, really good feedback from my student evaluations. I just got them back. And I can usually predict where the issues are going to be. And I'm a pretty good predictor of that. But I'm always surprised by the student feedback being so overwhelmingly positive. And I do attribute that to personal touches.

Facilitator (15:00):

That's great. [Barbara].

Barbara (15:01):

Yeah. I would say at our school, it's been very much... I started at [my current institution] in 2009. And since then, that entire time, it's been faculty who created their courses from scratch. So there were never any templates. There still aren't any templates that are required. And [Helen], we have a district as well, but it's not centralized. We're individually accredited colleges. But we do have a district, [Online Colleges] office. I think they were wanting to make [Online Colleges] a separate college of its own. And it just didn't fly. I don't know if it's still down the road. But they have an office that's been providing a lot of online support. And they've started offering professional development through QM and through ACAL. I mean, not ACAL, I'm sorry, they are ACAL. Through ACUE. And it's the first time that we've had dedicated professional development for online teaching after the online teaching certification course. And I attribute this to the person who was in charge of our distance learning and her priorities, which did not go toward online pedagogy and stuff like that.

(16:48):

And so, I felt like for a lot of those years, the online courses have been, and they still are, but it's getting a little bit better I think, in terms of... They were kind of all over the place in terms of structure, how they were managed. And it was really overwhelming for some students. And at that time, I was WAC director. And part of that was being head of the WAC writing center. And so I would see students struggling with their online classes being so different in how to navigate them and all of these things. And I feel like now it's getting a little bit better in terms of now there are some best practices that are being recognized as best practices by a larger group of people.

(17:43):

And so, I really like that. There's also a template that's available if you'd like to use it, but it's just a design template. A design template, plus it includes the beginning information about where students can get different resources, and all of these different things, and stuff like that that you can modify. And I am not surprised at all that you see greater student engagement in the courses where instructors have modified this. Because I think that the instructors who are more concerned with engaging students are the ones who are going to modify the course. Because they're going to go through it with a student's mindset and say, "Well, here's what I think is going to be confusing," or, "Here's where I usually say this and that."

(18:30):

So it's been interesting because for so long I was wanting there to be some sort of... I don't want to say unified structure. Because I don't mean the way it sounds. But I wanted there to be some sort of best practices that we were all following, so that students would go there and they'd be familiar with how to navigate the course at least. So that they would know where certain things are going to be. But still leaving a lot of freedom for faculty to put their own stamp on it. Anyway, I feel like we're moving in that direction. I think we have enough faculty who have been really... Like full-time faculty, I will specify because they're the ones who have the position from which they can fight the possible imposition of a really strict template. I think we have enough full-time faculty who are really dedicated to online teaching that there's going to be a lot of fight if they try to impose something.

(19:53):

But if they do try to impose something, I don't know... I could see it. I could see it happening still. I could still see it happening. And in the future. Especially since we've been moving toward things being more centralized. They wanted to make us one college with separate campuses. The only reason they didn't is because of grant money, because we have a historically Black college and they would lose that status, and that would be grant money. And I hate that. I mean, I love that it preserves the history for [the college]. But I hate that the reason was all about the money. But we seem to be moving towards centralizing things. So I could see down the road possibly something being imposed.

Facilitator (20:54):

That's interesting. We've heard sort of like... And you're even loathed to say template or-

Barbara (21:00):

I know, because-

Facilitator (21:01):

... Uniformities like, oh, no, no, no. But there is degree to which that we want to find that sweet spot between the imposition of curriculum where it's so tight that there's humanity to it anymore. Versus the wild west where you do just have so poorly designed classes that, as you say, students are... They're spending most of their intellectual cognitive energy on just figuring out the logic of the

design, forget about the content. And that's not really fair when they're having to do that across five or six classes.

Brynn (21:35):

I attribute that to code switching, just like you would a second language. I often use the analogy of I am on a Windows computer right now. But I have my trusty Mac right next to me at all times because I refuse to leave home without it. But I do. I think that's a code switching skill that people don't think about. Students are going to navigate all these different... And if you're teaching at multiple institutions, you might be on Blackboard. You might be on D2L. You might be on Canvas. And it's like they don't talk about the code switching that goes on with these software and these technologies. And then the other thing I was going to comment on was the whole standardized, we don't want to use the word standardized unified. But like [our facilitator] said, there's got to be a sweet spot. We have to be able to find the sweet spot. Maybe that's what this work is for...

Helen (22:31):

I feel like the sweet spot is getting instructors trained on those best practices. If people know what the best practices are and you get well-intentioned people, then implementing them, there can be some variation. But it still all makes sense. And I think that some of the terrible... Because...the online arm [at my institution], which also wanted to be maybe its own separate campus, but so far hasn't become that yet. But our college now is 50% online. And we have these 19 campuses where the students aren't coming to campus anymore. The buildings are empty. But anyway, I got sidetracked. What was I talking about?

Facilitator (23:19):

I think the point that you were making, if I-

Helen (23:21):

The sweet spot.

Facilitator (23:22):

.... Inferring it is like, if you can teach people good design practice, then you don't really have to impose the template. It bubbles up because everyone is using the more or less the same design instinct.

Helen (23:38):

But they didn't trust us. They didn't trust us, and they imposed a design template on us that didn't work for every discipline. And that was also bad.

Barbara (23:50):

Yeah.

Helen (23:50):

They should train faculty.

Barbara (23:54):

And it wasn't designed by you even. Even if you're going to impose something on people and you're saying we're going to have to all do the same thing, it needs to be designed by the people who are going to be using it?

Helen (24:03):

But it never is.

Barbara (24:05):

I don't think it should be imposed anyway. But yeah, it's never designed by the people who are going to be using it. We were talking about that earlier, right, [Facilitator]? In terms of rubrics.

Facilitator (24:17):

Exactly. Yeah.

Barbara (24:18):

Yeah.

Facilitator (24:21):

So my next prompt for us, and again, if there's just something that else that's on your mind, something that's really bugging you, or some great path forward for OWI, by all means, we can go in that direction. But my next prompt is, and we've touched on this, how if at all, has your OWI changed over the last few years? Maybe many years for some, maybe recently. And again, this could include COVID related things, but I don't want to just occupy that lane necessarily. Does anyone want to take that?

Barbara (24:54):

I would like to talk about real quick... Hopefully real quick, if not, stop me, about doing the ACUE faculty development. Where it was it really great because I mean, a lot of it was stuff I was already doing. There was a lot of stuff where, "Yeah, I know that. But I haven't been doing it because I've been lazy," or different things like that. One thing that struck me that I think has improved the class for my students so much, is taking away due dates. And I fought it. I could not even imagine doing it. And finally I said, okay, I'm just going to try. I took due dates off all of my assignments.

(25:37):

And I told students, "Here are the suggested due dates." So I had due dates on the Canvas assignments. So they were there, but I told them, "You're not going to get any points off if you don't turn it in by this time. This is a guideline to give you an idea of how to progress through the course in a timely fashion. If you get a certain amount of time behind, you're going to have problems." And I would email them. Of course, I was only teaching one class because it was in addition to my full-time job. And so I just do one. So it's fewer students to keep on top of. But it made such a huge difference for my students. And it was a thing that I heard so much about that even one time when I felt like the class had really gone off the rails and a lot of things had gone wrong that semester, students were like, "This class was amazing."

(26:35):

And one of the things they would always mention is having the flexibility to turn in the assignments later if they needed to. So what I started doing after the first tryout was I did a mid-semester and a final where, instead of all of them being kind of like, you don't have to turn them in at a certain time, everything from the first half of the semester had to be turned in by a certain date midway through. Everything from the second half of the semester had to be turned in by a certain date. And there

were some students who got really behind, not more than I've had before though. I really didn't notice a difference in the number of students who were getting behind in the course.

Facilitator (27:35):

Was it a composition course or what was the content?

Barbara (27:38):

Technical writing. So these were second semester students. Yeah. Or no, I'm sorry. Probably second year students probably. Some of them might have only taken the first comp. But most of them had taken two.

Brynn (27:53):

I have a question. I'm so sorry.

Barbara (27:55):

Yeah.

Brynn (27:55):

That's intriguing to me. How do you incorporate any sort of peer review even in the online format? Because how would that work?

Barbara (28:06):

That was the big challenge that I had. I do peer review in my technical writing class. So what I did is I told them that the peer... I didn't have the peer review as a grade, I had it as an assignment. But I didn't have it as a grade. Because not all students were going to be able to participate every time. By the end of the semester, all of my students had done at least two peer reviews during the semester. But not peer reviews for every single assignment. I mean, a couple of them had. The ones who were turning them in pretty regularly anyway. The peer reviews were also tied to that midterm date. So students would get their feedback at least by that midterm date.

Facilitator (29:10):

So I'll say the glass half empty part on behalf of maybe everyone. I can envision across my a hundred or so students I've got every semester. If I did away with due dates, even minimally, like a midterm and final, in my mind, I would have so much to grade right at midterm and then right at the final.

Barbara (29:38):

That's what I thought as well. And possibly that would be true. Maybe it's just the classes. I've only done this three times. Maybe it's just the classes that I was teaching. I didn't do it in my comp one class. I still wonder if the students could handle it in comp one. But I didn't have that case. I was grading continually throughout, which was actually a good thing for me because I would get maybe half of them turned in on the due date. Honestly, half of them. Honestly, with a hard and fast due date, I wouldn't get more than three-fourths of them turned in anyway. With my students, I'd have the rest of them saying I need an extension or things like that. So I was very surprised by that. And then I would be grading the others in batches as they were coming in.

(30:42):

I had a lot of students communicating with me about why they hadn't gotten it in by the due date, even though it wasn't really a due date, it's still there. So I think having it say due date in Canvas kept

a lot of them just on track anyway. A lot of the ones who weren't keeping on track, I don't know if they would have anyway. I'm not sure. But it worked really well and it seemed to be super positive for my students. It's not something that I'm going around recommending to people, because it was a very small sample size and a very specific course. But that was something that was very positive for my technical writing students.

Facilitator (31:29):

I do wonder if there is a possible future of higher ed writ large, let alone online writing instruction that is less class-based in the traditional format where you have a class or a group of 22 or 25, or however many students. And it really is more like an individual case management role that we take on for good or for ill.

Barbara (31:54):

I know [a large, private, not-for-profit institution in the West] and schools that do competency based seem to be working that way. I'm not going to say that it's entirely successful. And it really depends on what you're teaching as well. But it's an interesting thought.

Helen (32:14):

They used to call those correspondence courses.

Barbara (32:17):

Yeah. Yeah. And my husband did some courses through [that large, private, not-for-profit institution in the West]. And it was really interesting to see just how much interaction they provide for students. But the students have to partake, they have to go to the sessions, they have to make the effort.

Facilitator (32:40):

[Helen.]

Helen (32:44):

Well, I wanted to respond to the question about changes.

Facilitator (32:47):

Yeah.

Helen (32:48):

And there's two big changes. One of them is that our institution has also changed to a predominantly eight-week institution. And that has had humongous impacts in terms of redesigning courses to have less content, less peer reviews, less writing assignments, less everything, because they've got to get it done in eight weeks. So service learning is out the window. Any kind of complicated project gone, it's just boom, boom, boom. And so, if I were to take away due dates, that's terrifying to me. But I'll think about it. But I-

Barbara (33:22):

I did this during a five-week session.

Helen (33:24):

Oh my God.

Barbara (33:25):

And it worked. Color me surprised. I mean, shocked even. But I think it was because I kept sending out emails that were like, "Okay, we're all in this together. We got to get this done."

Helen (33:40):

But the other big change I feel, and maybe this is since the pandemic, I'm not sure. But there's been just so much more pressure on us to teach online as if it were face-to-face. Back in the old days, because I've been doing this for a while, I started writing online courses for my institution in the early 2000s. So things have changed a lot. It used to always be like, oh, you're not going to be the sage on the stage. You're going to be the guide on the side. And they took out lectures. There were no more lectures. But now they want us to put lectures back in. But of course, the lectures can't be standardized. You've got to record your own lectures every week. And they also want you to have synchronous meetings with students every week. Maybe they're optional because, of course, it's an online class. But you should be available once or twice a week to meet with students who might have questions and want to have a class period.

(34:36):

So now online is double the work. They want it to use all the things they got rid of that they realize, "Oh, that's really something that's kind of good. We should have kept that." But it's demanding way more from the instructors. It's so time-consuming now to teach online because you have to be recording videos, you have to be available for synchronous meetings. It's just on top of everything else. So that's a big change I see. That they took away our autonomy, but then now they're trying to force us to be face-to-face teachers in an online world. And I'm sure they got their ideas from ACUE. I don't know. Being a little bit cynical. I also went through the ACUE class and there was a lot of great things in there. But it also felt like it was designed for instructors who had autonomy to do a lot of interventions and make a lot of changes, which we don't really have. So it felt like, oh, they're showing us all this candy that we can't do.

Barbara (35:42):

Well, and a lot of the stuff wasn't meant for instructors who teach a 5-5 load.

Helen (35:47):

Yep. Right. Totally. Yep.

Facilitator (35:50):

What's ACUE? I've heard of QM, but not ACUE.

Helen (35:54):

I don't know what it stands for.

Barbara (35:59):

Association of College and University Educators, something like that.

Brynn (36:03):

Yeah. Sounds very close.

Facilitator (36:03):

I'll have to Google it.

Helen (36:03):  
Yeah. And it was a-

Brynn (36:03):  
ACUE, [Facilitator].

Helen (36:03):  
Yeah. Yeah,

Brynn (36:14):  
Not A-Q.

Facilitator (36:15):  
Okay.

Brynn (36:17):  
Yeah.

Facilitator (36:17):  
Academic quality, that could work.

Barbara (36:20):  
I'll put it in the chat, the link to their website.

Facilitator (36:25):  
Okay.

Brynn (36:26):  
Something I was thinking about in terms of answering this question. I finished my MA in the summer of 2020. So I started teaching in the fall of 2020 when everybody had no idea what was going on or how to do any of the things. And my institution was not any different. And so, I prefer asynchronous teaching. And also teach predominantly the speech class, the persuasion class. I've taught a rhetorical traditions class, but they're all writing intensive courses. So not actual composition courses, but just writing intensive across the curriculum. And so like I was saying, in my iterations of my speech class, well, I require a peer review as part of that as well. So for me, I think the biggest changes have been how to meet the students where they are. And I think that is mainly because the students have changed so much.

(37:34):

I just learned through a service project that another department on campus is doing, the seniors literally started high school... High school seniors started high school in the pandemic. They didn't go with their friends physically to school. They haven't had that traditional high school experience. And so now, oh my gosh, I'm going to be teaching them in a year or two. So what am I going to do with these students who have had this wonky high school experience? And I think for me, that's been my biggest change, is having to be more understanding and more compassionate. And not that I don't value mental health, I don't want to imply that... I'm very, very much into mental health awareness and wellness practices, mindfulness practices. But instead of having that in the back of your mind all



the time with students, I feel like you have to have that in the forefront. Because I don't know, [Barbara], changing due dates, or making them optional, or a guide gives me a lot of anxiety.

Barbara (38:45):

Oh, same here. Let me tell you, it took me a while to try that out.

Brynn (38:48):

I wrote some notes down and I'm not opposed, but I mean, the last class I taught asynchronous persuasion, that is a 3,600 level class. I mean, I had some of the worst students out of the communication major that I've had in three years. And I actually [inaudible 00:39:08] to the department chair and was like, what's happening? And I'm a communication major from this institution. So I have those relationships with the faculty, and I'm like, what changed? I don't think it's our admissions requirements or criteria. I think it's the students have changed. And I don't want to blanket the COVID thing, but I think that's going to be affecting students for years. Like I said, seniors in high school started high school in COVID. And so I don't think we're going to be able to get away from that, unfortunately. I think it has to be a consideration until it's not a consideration anymore. But when is it? My niece started kindergarten online in COVID. She's seven. So when is it not going to affect students?

Facilitator (40:06):

So this is for anybody. Do you feel the pull or the challenge from the in the depths of the pandemic period where it was all about flexibility, accommodation, people didn't have internet, let alone could they do my assignment or whatever. But are we far enough out now where we're actually potentially doing more harm than good by continuing to enable with too much flexibility, too much accommodation? And I don't mean just ditching due dates. I mean like just kind of do the class, however you're able and onward you go. Does anyone else feel sort of that tension?

Brynn (40:57):

I don't think anybody's talking about that tension as explicitly as you just stated it.

Facilitator (41:02):

Oops.

Brynn (41:03):

No, no. I think it has to be talked about. I think you are addressing the elephant in the room. I think it's a real possibility that the harm is going to be done. And I think as instructors, we have to find again, that sweet spot, that balance of what we're going to maybe see through from the students. I get to hide behind the... it's called the Student Disability Services Office here. And I get to hide behind that. I don't have to accept your documentation. I can tell you to go submit that to them. And if they deny you, then my hands are tied, your assignment's due.

(41:45):

But then I have the quintessential crying student in my office hours online that are like, "I've dealt with this, this, this, and this," and you're fighting tears. So I don't know. And it's hard with online. People can be good actors. And so I think it's really going to be... We're need the support of our institutions. We're going to need the support of our department chairs in navigating that. And I'll shut up. But I think you're talking out loud, [Facilitator], about a real issue that we might be seeing.

Barbara (42:28):

Well, and I think... I'm sorry. Go ahead, [Helen].

Helen (42:30):

No, go ahead.

Barbara (42:32):

Oh, I was going to say my perspective has been that COVID made these challenges more across the board. But I had a lot of students who were having the same challenges before COVID and are having the same challenges afterwards. And job insecurity, food insecurity is a real thing where I am. I mean, part of our strategic plan is to help eradicate poverty in [this Southern city], because we like to set these really doable goals.

Facilitator (43:13):

In five easy steps, I assume.

Barbara (43:22):

Yes. But in terms of flexibility, I had asked myself similar questions. And honestly, it was pre COVID when I was starting to hear these things about eradicating due dates or things like that. I didn't start it until after COVID. The things I did during COVID were temporary in my mind. But so many of those students need that flexibility anyway for their mental health, for their families, for their ability to take care of themselves and take care of their loved ones. And I include friends in that as well. And so, I haven't seen a harm being done to the students meeting learning objectives. I've seen a harm being done to my processes and the way I'm used to doing things. And to the way things fit into the course. And I feel like it's easier for me to try to change what I'm doing than for those students to when they're struggling to get an education in the face of so much.

Facilitator (45:01):

Well, we are probably past our allotted 30 minutes or so. And I certainly don't want to shut things down if there are final thoughts or any questions for the group writ large. But if there are not, then I would thank you once again for your time. And I don't know if I communicated this out or if I was clear, but we do actually have some project or research grant money that we've been awarded, part of which will pay for the transcription of stuff. But we're also now able to offer our participants, which is you, \$50 Amazon gift card. So congratulations.

Helen (45:36):

I don't think I knew that, but thank you.

Brynn (45:39):

I didn't know that either.

Facilitator (45:41):

You're all winners in my book. So it'll all be digital. So look for that email. I assume it will show up. Don't delete it, or check your spam folder or whatever. Any final thoughts, or questions, or anything that anybody has?

Helen (46:00):

I just want to say thank you because it's always good to be asked our opinions. And I mean, I feel like we're all dealing with similar issues. And I don't know what the solution is to anything. So I'll look forward to hearing the report.

Brynn (46:19):

I was just going to add too, thank you for listening and taking our opinions into account. And then I am so excited to read the report and see what has changed. I mean, we know it's changed from 2011. But what's changed and how those changes are going to impact the next 12 years or 11 years of work. And things like the onset and the influx of use of AI in writing, and what colleges are doing and not doing. And so I just think it's wildly important, the work that you're doing, [Facilitator]. So, thank you.

Facilitator (47:02):

Yeah. Well, I'll vouch for the wild part, that's for sure. I was talking with a friend who actually teaches in our computer science program. And we were joking about Apple's release of its AR-VR headset for \$3,500 or \$4,000, whatever it is the other day. But it did prompt us to start thinking about once that technology looks like this and not these big humongous things that you have to wear. And then the AI machine starts feeding you information to augment your perception. It's like, holy, what's next? Flying cars? Man, oh man, that's outer space kind of stuff.

Barbara (47:44):

Yeah. And those of us who read sci-fi anyway are kind of going, which novel is it going to turn out to be?

Facilitator (47:51):

Yeah, right. Visions of Blade Runner. Okay. Well, again, thank you very much for a delightful conversation. As you said, it's always interesting to hear so many similar situations, similar challenges coming from such diverse perspectives, campuses, roles on campus, and all that kind of stuff. So we will continue with our various focus group conversations. And then we'll do our best to communicate holistically once a report is written, or that data becomes available, or whatever next steps might involve. But thanks so much and for your participation in making it happen.

Barbara (48:33):

Thank you.

Helen (48:34):

You too.

Brynn (48:34):

Thank you.

Barbara (48:35):

Bye.

Brynn (48:35):

Bye.

## Focus Group 4: Meghan, Clara, & Haley

Facilitator (00:02):

Okay, so you might be getting that little popup that asks you if everything's still cool. All right, great. The first prompt I've got is really just an open-ended question for anybody to jump in. Maybe we will start with Meghan. Talk about challenges and/or successes related to your current online writing instruction work.

Meghan (00:28):

Challenges would be to get engagement beyond week three, because students have a tendency to fall off and not come back. I don't know why, because I can't sit there and go, "Hey, what's the problem?" One success that I have had is that when I am grading the essays, I don't do it in a vacuum or with a glass of wine. Instead, I do it via Zoom or Skype or Google Meet. I'm trying to think of the other avenues that some of my students have requested. We meet and we talk about the essay, because they don't get any in-class instruction.

(01:11):

I'd really like to hear where they're coming from. I actually have discovered some very serious challenges with that, because students will say to me, "Oh, I'm so glad we're meeting. My teacher before wrote F-R-A-G all over my paper. So I think I want to make more of those." I'm like, "No, no, no, honey. You don't want to make more FRAG. That's not good." So it does go ahead and clear up some misconceptions and things of that nature. I think that's a plus, is being able to talk to them so they know they're not-

Facilitator (01:47):

How have students responded to that? Have you gotten any feedback?

Meghan (01:48):

Fanfreakingtastic.

Facilitator (01:48):

Yeah.

Meghan (01:52):

They said that they like the fact that they actually get to meet the instructor. Because they then learn my quirky personality, they don't take anything... Like I'm not trying to insult anybody. I'm like, "Yeah, that didn't work, did it?" Then they'll be like, "Oh my God, you're so funny." I'm like, "Okay." They don't take things that I write, like comments that I might say. "You might want to think about beefing this up a bit, because it's really... You're giving me minimalism, which is fine for a fashion thing, but it is not fine... Home decor, minimalism, go, but not in an essay."

(02:33):

So they'll talk to me about those things, and how do I get it to be more? I also notice that there's more... Because I'm the co-director of the writing center, I noticed that there's more people trekking to the writing center. Because I'm like, "You might want to get another set of eyes on this before you turn it in." Then they're, "Oh, okay." They didn't even think about it. Nobody told them about it. They don't know what this thing is. They don't realize, "Oh, I thought that was pre-grading." I'm like, "No, no, no. They're just there to help you out."

Facilitator (03:11):

Anybody care to take it from here? Challenges, successes, either sort of more locally or, again, departmentally?

Clara (03:20):

Do you mean like training-wise, or teaching-wise, or any of the above? Is there-

Facilitator (03:27):

Any of the above, whatever strikes you as interesting sort of OWI related.

Clara (03:31):

Okay. Well, we are having some challenges, I think. I'm sure that this is not unique in the sort of... "We're going to give you way more students, and not support you, and expect this to still be a quality class." I think because people don't understand what it takes for a quality class. [Meghan], when you were talking, I had so many questions about that whole process, but I feel like that that's a different... Because I have 63 students every seven weeks. So for me, if I'm going to try to meet every student individually, I just wouldn't sleep. Also we get feedback from... I'm just curious how that works in so many ways, because a lot of my...

(04:15):

Even just getting students to schedule a Zoom with me is sometimes very problematic. Because they are like, "Well, I have a full-time job here, and a part-time job here, and a family. Also, I live in England," or whatever. So it's very difficult. It can be really hard, and I have to be very flexible myself with, "Okay. If the only time you can meet is 8:00 PM my time, then I'll do that for you." But I don't think that administration understands that sometimes that's what students need. So we're getting all of this sort of pressure to add more students, not get paid any more. They're certainly not able to give me more time in my day. To me, that seems to be sort of a disconnect.

(05:01):

My local supervisor, like the faculty head of the writing program, she's fully aware of what an actual good online class is. But above her, she's getting pressure to do... I mean, they just keep saying, "Do more with less," is their favorite thing. I'm like, "Okay, but do you want a good class? Because if you need that, if you want students to brag to their friends, and get them to come to this school, because they've had such a great experience, then we have to give them a good experience." The correspondence method of online writing instruction, which I'm pretty sure is what a lot of administrators are still thinking, "Oh, yeah. You're just there. Put everything in the class just one time. No one has questions, or maybe they email you."

(05:52):

I don't know what they think, but it's not my experience. I've had a lot of great success sort of in the middle of that, where I do video feedback instead of meeting. I'll do a video of my screen. They can hear me. Hopefully with the same... I feel like I'm funny and quirky and weird, because they do. The students take... And again, I'm sure I'm not saying anything revolutionary here, but neutral reads negative online. So I find myself having to overly compensate with extra exclamation points and emojis and stuff, which is a new thing for me. Five years ago, I would've said, "I will never do that, because that's so unprofessional."

(06:31):

But then the flip side of that is, students think that you're mean and whatever. So I've had a lot of good success with... And I set a five-minute timer. I go over a lot, but I do. Because I know they won't watch it. Right? Then there's the, how much will they sit there and engage with not a real person on

the other end? But I have had a lot of good success with that. So I guess that's a very long-winded way of saying, the bigger administration has no idea what we do. The local administration does, and I'm very glad that we have that person to advocate for us. But she's sort of in a pressure cooker, in that she can't really say, "You're not giving all of my instructors 10 more students, without paying them more. That's not going to give a good class."

Facilitator (07:18):

What's the semester configuration that you've got with seven weeks and that many? Are they all in one section, or is it multiple? How many, what's the section-

Clara (07:27):

We're part of, so there's several different... Most students on campus take traditional 15 week, August to December, January to April/May courses. So we have two sessions within that. I'll get a group from August to October, and then another group October to December. There's like half a week in between, or something. They just take that 15 weeks, divide it in two. I have an A session and a B session, and 63 students every time, because I have a [inaudible 00:07:58] position.

Facilitator (08:02):

Now I'm really interested. Are there no, what I would say 16 week or 15 week online classes?

Clara (08:13):

Not in the programming, which I teach. The powers that be have said that we need students to be able to finish a English 101 class in seven and a half weeks, and an English 102 class in seven and a half weeks. Where I teach, we only do, the writing course is 101, 102. Or 105, which is supposed to be like a combination of two. I honestly couldn't tell you how students get into 105 versus the other two. But yeah, we have asked for students to be able to take them in a 15 week session. Apparently, again, powers that be say no. They want students to be able to power through those classes, and get through. Yeah, it's a very fast-paced class.

Facilitator (09:00):

Again, how are the 63 divided? Are they divided into multiple sections, or is it just one-

Clara (09:06):

I have one section of 63, and I can separate them into smaller discussion groups. So for discussions, I can put them in smaller groups. Also, our curriculum is supposed to be pre-made, but it leaves a lot to be desired still.

Facilitator (09:24):

Uh-huh. That could be our next topic right here.

Clara (09:27):

Yeah. For me, it's a very weird middle space. Also, side note, let me just... I'm also getting my doctorate in online writing instruction. That's my focus. So just tell me to stop talking, because I could go on forever. But our program is a little bit weird. I feel like most other programs, you get a blank shell, and good luck to you. Or a very scripted, "Here's what we are going to do every single week. The scaffolding is already built in." Everything is like... "Here's how you grade. Here's exactly what we're looking for." Because our administrator tries to give us some agency, we're sort of this

weird middle. Where we have some freedom within that, but also we still have to build some stuff, but it's not totally blank. I don't know. It's a trade-off of things.

Facilitator (10:16):

Mm-hmm. Before I turn it to [Haley], [Meghan], I'd really like to know... I think I interrupted you when you were trying to jump in. Do you remember what you had to say?

Meghan (10:26):

Yeah. I just wanted to let you know, [Clara]. I don't know if you've seen it, Chaminade University of Honolulu completed, I don't know, bookoo amounts of research on the ideal size for an online writing course. They did theirs in 10 week spurts. They said it should be no more than 15, because the students will not get anything out of it if it is more. The one other good thing is, to avoid instructor burnout, which is a thing for online, as you know, they go ahead and say, "All right. Here's your 15 or your 16." I can't remember if it's 15 or 16.

Clara (11:10):

Is that students, like, "Here's your 15 students"?

Meghan (11:12):

Yeah.

Clara (11:13):

Hah. Okay.

Meghan (11:14):

I know, I know.

Clara (11:15):

It's about the money, right? They're trying to get in more students. They're trying to take the same amount of tuition, maybe even a little bit more, and pay, but have no extra. They just don't understand how it works, right? That's just-

Meghan (11:27):

Well, they're following a business model instead of an education model, which I think is part of the problem.

Clara (11:33):

Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Meghan (11:34):

But the other thing that Chaminade determined to avoid teacher burnout is that, "Okay, so we're going to give you this shell with 16 students in it." Let's say that, right? Then what they will do is they will go ahead and, for every five students they go over, they will go ahead and pay you an extra unit.

Clara (11:59):

I need to work there, I think. I'm going to apply there. First, I'm going to finish my doctorate, because I'm getting free tuition. Then when I'm done, I'll go ahead and apply there, because that sounds... But

I mean, that's the rub, right? I feel like there's a really big difference between what we as educators understand students need, and that experience, because we are there all day every day, versus the people sort of... I'm going to say it. It's not going to sound great. In the high towers over here, who've never taken an online class. They've never taught an online class. No one has showed them, "Well, this is... Hypothetical world. Here's the class you're envisioning for yourself. You take it, and you tell me how it is, versus here's the class we're envisioning."

(12:42):

No one's done like an A/B test to be like, "Well, here's what you're actually proposing. Does that sound like something that anyone's going to sign up for, if they know what they're, probably not." But they don't have that experience. They don't have that groundwork. They came up through the traditional butts in seats. All these, they never took an online class. I have supervisors who've never taken an online class, and they're in charge of the class. I'm like, "You don't know what... Okay. All right. But that's not how I would do that."

Facilitator (13:16):

Haley, do you want to jump in here?

Haley (13:18):

Sure. One of the interesting things that seems a little bit different in my institution from yours is that our institution does not allow us to teach the freshman composition kind of courses, the composition rhetoric course in an online format. We have to do those face-to-face. I mean, they let us for COVID. But as soon as possible, they said, "Okay, everybody's back. It has to be face-to-face." The only online writing class we do is the technical and professional writing class. It's very much a practical writing class. We start off with an application packet, which immediately gets them, "Oh, this is practical. I can see how this applies to my life."

(13:59):

I was part of the revision committee for this class starting in 2018, or something like that. It's been online for a while. It was designed for online, as opposed to many of the online writing classes, which I feel someone took a regular writing class and tried to make it online. We have teamwork built into it. Working at a distance, they have to complete a recommendation report, all of that kind of stuff. One of the things is, being a part of that revision committee, we set up an OER. We finished writing it. Do I need to define that for the record? Open Educational Resource, we wrote a textbook basically that's free for the students. The way that one worked, we were switching from Blackboard to Canvas while we were in the middle of the revision.

(14:53):

So in addition to revising the assignments, we were also revising how they were presented. We ended up having one module per day of the course, and making the course as if it was a Monday, Wednesday, Friday class, as opposed to... So it's much more structured. It's structured in short bursts. You have to do your first part of discussion point post on Monday, and then you have to respond by Wednesday. Having a lot of internal deadlines, which works really well for some students, with keeping them on track and on task, and making sure things get done. Really, it does not work for other students who see online and think, just completely flexible. I can just do it all at the end. But we do it that way for a number of reasons, for feedback.

(15:41):

We had a cap of 22, and that is going up this fall. Because our administration, same as yours, it sees online class and thinks, "Oh, it's just easy." In our case, it's because the administration only has experience with online classes in large science lecture things, and thinks that all tests are multiple choice. That's going up a couple. Most teachers teach more than one section. The lectures, APTF



non-tenure teach four sections, so four sections of 22, 88. Like like I said, that's going up. So it's going to be four sections of 24, usually not all 210. They might have two of 210, and two in-person rhetoric and composition, and mix it up. Yeah. 210 is technical and professional writing.

(16:43):

The challenge is... Grading as always, because writing classes are nothing without feedback. Different professors do it different ways. Different teachers do it different ways, which you would. We have some graders who are graduate students, who are given a section of, "This is your class to answer questions, your class to grade papers." But the whole entire shell is given to them. The student, they add their... I think the changes they make is they add their contact information on the front page. It's completely given to them. Then other instructors decide what they want to do, and just build their own from scratch. We have a version that it's everything, and the instructors can do what they want, as far as what they keep and what they don't keep.

(17:29):

It's a lot of freedom in that, "Here it is, but you can use this as a resource. If you want to change it, change whatever you like. Maybe you want to do the units in a different order. Maybe you don't like the teamwork, and want to make it an individual project instead. Or maybe you want to make your..." So we do have... And because we're changing from Blackboard to Canvas, and I was the part on the committee who actually understood what was going on with the technology the most, I was the one who mainly made the Canvas course. It got a lot of positive feedback from students, but we were still getting a lot of feedback from students about how it felt like it was a lot of busy work. Because they don't necessarily understand that practice is the way to get better at writing.

(18:15):

One of the things that I did last year that ended up really working well, I changed it to a contract grading course structure. So instead of, "You have to get 100% here. You have to get a percentage on each of the papers." Each of the papers became worth five points. If you wanted an A, you had to revise them up to five out of five. There's three chances for revision, and you could do more if you needed it. If you wanted a B, you have to revise all the major papers up to a four. If you wanted a C, you had to make sure you got a minimum of three on the major papers. You had to do a certain percent of daily one-off small assignments. Things like find a code of ethics for a company, or a field that you're interested in going into. See what they say is their code of ethics, and talk about it.

(19:05):

So it's a short assignment, one point. Everything's either worth one point, you did it or you didn't. Or if they didn't do it well, like if they half-assed it, you say, "No, fix this," and they have to turn it in. Because it was so revision based, and so much, they could decide what level of effort they were going to put in. I had a number of seniors who were like, "Oh, I'll just get a three on everything," and that's fine. Then the ones who really want to work for it, it was such a relief, because they were actually reading my comments. I'm sure you have experienced that. Where if you make comments on a draft, and then you get the final draft and you're like, "I told you to fix this."

Clara (19:46):

Especially if you record it and put it on YouTube, and then you can see if they watched it or not. Sorry, I interrupted.

Haley (19:52):

Yeah, that's true.

Clara (19:52):

Be like, "You didn't even watch it."

Haley (19:55):

Yeah, they wouldn't let us put feedback on YouTube. Anyway, our school's pretty strict about FERPA stuff. No, they wouldn't let us do that. We can do recordings, but it has to be in Canvas. Yeah. Anyway, but watch counts is a good idea. But then because they had to fix what you tell them to fix. "I told you to fix this." So that revision up to level, I've done that. The last two semesters was when I switched this one to a grading contract type course, and it made a huge difference in the students feeling they had the agency to decide things. Because they'll get the grade.

(20:38):

They're guaranteed to get the grade they're working for, there's less of that anxiety and stress. It was the first time I tried to do a contract grading for an online course. I've been doing something similar in my literature course for years. I was pretty happy with how the combination of the online space and the contract grading discussion worked out, as far as keeping the responsibility for learning in the hands of the student, and giving them the feeling that they had the agency and the ability to complete the work, and learn the skill and demonstrate the skill. Yeah.

Facilitator (21:13):

How much of the course time, for lack of a better term, do you have to devote upfront to building the contract? Because I assume each student does their own version, or is it more like a system that's in place?

Haley (21:29):

I give them a, "If you want an A, here's what you do. If you want a B, here's what you do. If you want a C, here's what you do. Decide what it is, and that's our contract. That if you do this, you will get this. If you want an A, get a five on all the major projects, a four on the minor shorter projects, and at least 90% of the one point assignments finished. If you want a B, do this. If you want a C, do this." Yeah, in a smaller course, I would, though. In the in-person course for contract grading, I take the first day of class, and we write the contract together as a course, with kind of the default being a B.

(22:05):

Then if you want an A, here's the extra. If you want a C, here's a little less of you to work. For that one, for instance, how many days of class is it reasonable to miss, and still get an A? It was kind of, this way the discussion starts. So they helped to build it, but it's the same contract for everyone, and they just pick which level they want to go at. Mine are not necessarily labor based in the same way as [Researcher] talks about doing labor logs and that kind of thing. Mostly because I can't figure out how to keep track of that stuff, and keep my sanity.

Clara (22:42):

[Researcher] has a process. He works at my school, so we've had him come and talk. We have a version of a contract.

Haley (22:48):

Yeah.

Clara (22:48):

Yeah. He showed us the whole log thing, and I was like, "I can't. I don't know how you keep track of all-"

Haley (22:53):

Not with 63 students.

Clara (22:54):

As soon as I need an Excel sheet outside of Canvas to keep, I'm out. I can't do it.

Facilitator (22:59):

You need a spreadsheet to keep track of the spreadsheets. That's like-

Meghan (23:02):

Yes.

Haley (23:02):

Yeah.

Clara (23:03):

He does, and that works very well for him. But I'm like, "Yeah, Excel gives me hives."

Haley (23:07):

I understand his argument and stuff.

Clara (23:09):

Sure.

Haley (23:11):

The labor-based contract things I think would maybe work for, like if I was going to teach a creative writing course, I might put a labor-based contract. Or for a creative project maybe, a multimodal project requirement. But for something like technical and professional writing specifically, there is a semi objective level of, if you're in the business world and you write this, you will be taken seriously. That is based on cultural assumptions and biases, and all that kind of stuff, like [Researcher] was arguing against, but it's also practical that my students need it.

Clara (23:50):

Yeah. Side note, there's some people who disagree with his idea. Yeah.

Haley (23:57):

Yeah. So I like the contract grading. It's not the labor based. It's like skill mastery, I guess. If you mastered writing an application, mastered writing a proposal. Our equivalent of A means that your boss would let you send this to someone. A B means your boss would say, "Fix these things, and then you can send it to someone." A C is, "Why don't you take some time to revise this, and then maybe we'll be ready."

Facilitator (24:25):

F is for fired.

Haley (24:27):

Yeah, pretty much. D is, "I think maybe we should get you a supervisor to help you, hold your hand through this."

Facilitator (24:36):

That is actually a good segue to my next prompt or question. Again, I want to reiterate that, even though I ask it, if there's a different direction or there's just anything on your mind, by all means jump in and take us in a different direction. My next prompt is how, if at all, assuming, has your online writing instruction changed over the last few years? Either a short time period, or if you've been at it a while, maybe that longer time period. Certainly if folks want to comment on the COVID pandemic, but it's not exclusively that kind of a question. Like, how did the pandemic change your OWI? Anyone want to jump in on that one?

Clara (25:20):

Go, [Meghan]. Go, [Meghan].

Meghan (25:24):

When I first started teaching online, I was living in [coastal city], and my online courses were designed for individuals in the military. I can tell you this from personal experience. I was not good if they disappeared. In a regular campus, if they disappeared, it was like whatever. When they disappeared while I was doing the classes for the military personnel, I was constantly checking injuries, death. There's a database that the government carries. I'm like, "Oh my God, are they alive," kind of a thing. It was very stressful. I do not recommend it, because it's really stressful.

(26:13):

But I can say that I was 100% genre based when I first started out. Then I started becoming more outside partner, project based. Today, if I'm running an online course, my [introductory course number] class is face-to-face this fall. But if I were running it online, I would find out what small things the students could do for a final project, make it collaborative. We partner with [a local] National Park [in the West], and we partner with [a large, National Parks] Network [in the Southwest]. The stuff with the [National Park] is all done in collaboration with, for some reason, I just love my chemist. So my chemist and I are constantly putting projects together that can be done online for upper division.

(27:11):

But for lower division, we stick with [the local park], because I can get on the phone immediately with them and say, "Okay, so they want to put together a native garden. What do you need for this native garden? Do you need placards? What do you need?" So that then we can work on that project. "Oh, we need a workbook on otters, on river otters. Okay." I'll tell you, they get really super cute. They'll tell me, "Oh, we need it for high school, we need it for middle school, we need it for elementary school." So we help them with their education and their educational projects. It's dramatically different. Now, they know it has consequence.

(27:57):

A lot of the students say that, when they're on break, they came in and go, "Oh my gosh, I went to [the local] National Park. It was the best." It's a question of... Also for their small writing assignments, I'll go ahead and have them take a look at cams. Like, God, Denali has an awesome one. There's a bunch of places. The Channel Islands has an amazing webcam. So I'll tell them to go look at various webcams, and to see how they might be able to learn how to go ahead and communicate with somebody who has sight issues, or hearing issues, or those kinds of things. Because I want the students to... We have one major at this school, which is pre-health professions. Which means that these students, they will get a BS in health sciences.

(28:54):

But their particular coursework is they're studying to be future doctors, future dentists, future nurses, those kinds. So health of the environment and health of the individual are directly connected. It takes a little bit to get them to see that. But our students, for the most part, pick up on it pretty quickly. I'll say, "Watch the webcam. Tell me what would happen if somebody got in the way of a bear grabbing a salmon." Then they go in and say, "Oh, that's a bad thing." Yes. Yes, there have been maulings by river otters, when people have gotten way too close to the babies. Mama otter is fierce. She's a little baby wolverine. She'll just come right out and attack the individual, and send them to the hospital.

Facilitator (29:50):

I hope they included that in the handbook for the eighth graders, or whatever it was.

Meghan (29:53):

I know. Don't mess with the otters.

Facilitator (29:57):

Well, I love that turn to the authentic sort of community writing with and for the community. It seems like a really interesting development.

Meghan (30:05):

Well, it makes certain that they're actually invested in it. The few surveys I've done, the students say that they're really choosy about their sources. Whereas before, they would go straight to Google, now they actually work with our librarian. Which I'm like, "Oh, thank God." They also said they're more careful about how they write for that outside partner.

Facilitator (30:31):

[Clara], you want to take the, how has your OWI changed in the-

Clara (30:35):

Yeah. I would agree with everything that [Meghan] just said, in terms of I think it's... I don't know, maybe it's just where I've found myself ending up. But it does seem to be more practical based, rather than sort of, again that, "Well, we're really just preparing you to eventually get a PhD in this." I feel like that was sort of the old system. "Yes, all the writing that we do is really just so you can get a Master's, and then get a PhD." Which we all know, as we teach writing, that doesn't necessarily get you a better job in our positions.

(31:05):

For me, along with that, I think what I've noticed in myself, and part of it probably was I started teaching when I was 22. I started teaching online when I was 26 or something. Now I'm 41. But I've always just felt very young and very imposter syndrome. I think I came out and was very, "I am in charge here," sort of thing. "This is exactly what you're going to do. If you're a day late, F." Right? I mean, probably not that bad, but very sort of, this is the real world. But then the more I experienced the real world, I was like, "Nobody does that. Nobody does that."

(31:47):

My husband is an attorney. He can be late on stuff, as long as he says, "Dear, judge. I need more time." Even in these very high stressful things, it's very rare that someone says, "If you don't exactly by this exact time, you fail. So as I've experienced more, I think I've become more of a real human

being, and started to see students more as real human beings. Again, where I work, we're very into [inaudible 00:32:13], we're trying to do all of these things to really see... I know that was a lot of people I just threw out there. But to really see students as humans, not so much... Just like I don't want them to think of me as a machine on the other side, I try to see them.

(32:30):

So a lot more lenient on, "Hey, if you're going to be late, just let me know. We'll work something out." Which again, more work on my part. Way easier to say, "You turn that in... If Canvas says 12:01, I'm not grading it." That's way easier, but it doesn't make students okay being like, "Oh, also I have a question about my thesis statement." You can't have both, I don't think. So I've become a lot more available, but that's also as technology... Like we didn't have Zoom. When I started teaching online, it wasn't a thing. I think that has also added another element, where you can actually meet video-wise. Even when that started, I was like, "Turn your camera on." Now I'm like, "You want to keep your camera off, whatever." Sort of this thing.

(33:17):

Also, we used to put everything through Turnitin. We don't use Turnitin at all now, because our prompts are very personal. So there's no way... I mean, maybe now with ChatGPT. That's a whole other discussion. We ask them to write about very local things that affect them on a personal level. They have to write about it on a personal level, so you're not going to be able to go to Google, and Google tell you, how is the lack of recycling at your Starbucks impacting your local Starbucks? Right? That's not a story Google can make for you. It's a story they can make for themselves, and they can take pictures of, multimodal take... "Here's a picture of our overflowing trashcan, which is half full of whatever."

(33:59):

Those are very specific things that, again, make them more human. I think that's the biggest change for me, is really letting go of some of those, "I'm in charge, and you will do everything." Allowing more student agency. Again, a lot of my students, they have full-time jobs. They have families. They're not necessarily those 18-year-olds, but I think the 18-year-olds need the same thing too. Everyone likes a choice. Everyone likes knowing that what they're doing is going to matter in some way. They don't always see that. It takes some prodding sometimes, and some of them still never understand. But I think slowly we'll get there. Yeah. To me, that's a really big difference from how I started, just the compassion.

Facilitator (34:45):

Yeah. Yeah. It's really interesting, as we talk about some of the changes that we have either experienced or championed ourselves, that turn to the more multimodal, project based, authentic kind of community engagement writing. It's almost like that mode, and maybe this is just a Pollyanna issue of me and reveals my own bias. The online writing instruction, that as a mode of delivery is really very well suited for that kind of project based work. It's not like you can't do group work anymore. That is sort of like an emerging 21st century skill, is asynchronous collaboration.

(35:29):

It kind of goes to something that Haley had said earlier. How designing courses sort of born digital, born as online writing courses, they are so much more able to tap into all of those positive movements in writing rhetoric generally. Whereas if they're just holdovers from at some point a decade and a half ago, where someone just loaded Word documents into a learning management system, the potential and the affordances are there. It's just, are we taking advantage?

Clara (36:03):

Yeah, I think that's very true. Just the same thing with the misunderstanding. Your class is going to feel very different if you're in a room with round tables, versus... All of that setup is really different. I think that's an analogy that people who've never taught online can understand. If everyone's facing the front, you're going to have a certain kind of experience. If you've got people sitting in pods of four, it's a different experience. If your table's round, a different experience. It's the same thing online.

(36:28):

Back to what [Haley] was saying, where they moved from one thing to another. Our institution tried to do the same thing, and I was like, "This is not the same building. You've moved buildings, and you're trying to keep the same floor plan. You can't do that. You have to now be like, 'Oh, the tables look like this. We need to change that.'" Even a simple change, which again, people don't understand. But a change from Blackboard to Canvas, you're going to have to change your class. You're going to have to pack it up and move it, and you can't just assume that everything is... It's not the same building. It's a different building.

Haley (36:57):

Yeah, you do the import/export thing. It's just hopeless.

Clara (37:01):

Even worse, moving it from, which I think was a COVID thing, trying to take your in-person class and throwing it online, different building. You can't... We can, because we did, but it sucked. But that's not a good class. That's not how someone who's going to sit there and really design it, is not just going to take, "Oh, I did this exact same thing in person, and now I'm just going to throw it..." Or my favorite, "I'm going to take my one-hour lecture and put it online, and that's going to be how I'm teaching."

Haley (37:27):

As a video. Yeah, no.

Clara (37:29):

Right. No, no. That's not how you... You can. People did it. It just wasn't great. But that's not how people who do this, and really do it well. You can do it, and then you can do it well. Yeah. You have to understand the building and the area that you're in, and then you have to keep changing. Zoom is a possibility now. Start meeting on Zoom, right? Or whatever your preferred thing is. Yeah, I agree with all that.

Facilitator (37:57):

[Meghan], do you want to jump in?

Meghan (37:58):

Yeah, if I could. There I think is an assumption that, "Oh, we can take the exact same material that we cover in the same way, and we can just flip it into a Zoom room, or into a module on Canvas, and get the same results." You can't, because students are not going to engage in the exact same way with a Canvas as they are in a classroom. If I wanted to have, like I teach a writing in the health sciences course. Which I've been asked to put online, but I'm like, "This isn't going to work for me. I've got to figure it out." Because in order to do that, I have to change from the round table discussion that I have in every class.

(38:48):

Where we have one small group of student leaders leading the conversation, asking the questions, talking about what's important to them about a particular article, about a particular reading, about a particular issue in healthcare. This is not something I can just automatically flip into a module type situation, because there's not going to be a conversation. It's not going to happen in the same way. Now, they're finding that a lot of students don't really like the idea of being online. Or rather, they feel like they have more social issues now that they're coming back, I should say, rather than... Communicating and collaborating online is dramatically different now than it was in 2019.

Facilitator (39:50):

[Haley], did you want to take up the final question?

Haley (39:53):

I mean I kind of answered when I said I started doing grading contracts.

Facilitator (39:57):

Yeah.

Haley (39:57):

Other things that happened in 2018 to 2019 was that I started doing group projects. They all write a proposal, and then they used to all carry out their proposal. An internal research proposal, where they made a proposal about some organization or company that they had connection to the boss, that they could access the decision makers. Then they could research and come back with a, "Here's what we think you should do." It's a lot of what [Meghan] was talking about with the external. A lot of times, they just want to do their student club, because it's easy on campus. But the good papers are the ones that work with nonprofits, and like their uncle's lawn care business, a bunch of random small stuff.

(40:43):

How do we research how this small company can do better marketing? How do we research which piece of equipment this nonprofit should buy? That kind of thing, so product research, recommendation report stuff. Then I started having them do, after everybody wrote a proposal and they were put into teams, they pick one of their proposals to do together. You get the individual writing practice, they're responsible for it. And then working as a team to do primary and secondary research combined, to lead to the recommendation report.

(41:19):

Because I was on the committee, and I suggested that, it ended up being the model for most of the classes at the university. A lot of the other sections now use it. I got materials from the organization on campus that does teacher training, pedagogy training for faculty members who want to become better teachers. Got materials for them about collaboration and stuff, and kind of adapted it to an online situation. Anyway, so adding the group work online, spreading that out, turning the group contract. That's kind of trickling through our department in various ways as well. I think that those probably have been the two biggest changes.

Facilitator (42:05):

It's great to hear that-

Clara (42:05):

Here... Sorry, go ahead.



Facilitator (42:05):

No, no. [Clara], go ahead.

Clara (42:06):

I'm just curious. Are most of the students that are taking that online class, are they also in person? Do you know what-

Haley (42:15):

Yes.

Clara (42:15):

That's not the... Okay.

Haley (42:17):

Most of the students who are taking the online class are local.

Clara (42:19):

Okay, that was my question.

Haley (42:19):

They take class online because it's hard to fit it into a specific time of day with their required classes for their major. They're like, "I'm here. I'm local." They're on my time zone. Actually, most of them are in town, and also taking classes in person in other departments. But because it's hard to find an English 210 class that can fit around their engineering courses or whatever, then they end up taking the online one for the flexibility in the schedule. I've had a lot of students who... Not a lot, a significant amount. I can count them, who have dropped the class within the first three weeks, because they're like, "An online class is not working for me. I'm not staying on top of it. I just forget about it, because I feel the urgency of my in-person classes. I'm going to sign up for an in-person one next semester."

(43:17):

Some people take a little too long to figure that out. But I do think that, you were talking about how online communication and options for that have changed recently. And that a lot of what we're doing as far as being able to work asynchronously as a team, to keep track of your own schedule, those are some good life adult skills for them to learn. Most of my students are within the 18 to 22-year-old range, but not all of them by a long shot. I actually do have, we have quite a few vets at our school. Because it's a technical professional writing class, they have to take it for a lot of their majors. A lot of them come in like, "I've been writing reports for years. What do you want me to do?" But sometimes even they're like, "Oh, okay. I see why I've been doing this."

Facilitator (44:10):

[Clara], was your question partly about just logistics of group work and asynchronous classes?

Clara (44:15):

Yeah. Because to me, when I think, and even just in this group, I mean, it's all online writing instruction, but there's such a different experience. My program is all online, so that's different than anyone else here, I think. But I love that idea. I guess my real question was, how logistically difficult is

that, to try to bring in group work synchronously when students are sort of expecting an asynchronous experience?

Haley (44:43):

Well, the thing is that, the way... It all comes to how you set it up. We actually do an equivalent of a class module, whatever, on project management skills. The students come up with a task schedule. "Here's our research steps we're going to do," and break it down. "Okay. By this time, we're going to have written the survey. We're going to distribute it this way." Then they come up with, they break all of it down, and then they kind of discuss and sign up. They have a meeting. If you have a group of four people, you can find a time when four people can meet. I teach them, "Hey, look at Doodle poll."

(45:21):

They basically come up with a task schedule. They write a team charter, where they identify, "I'm going to be out of town for this week, because I'm on the sports team. I'm going to do this." So they identify places where their teammates know not to expect them to work that week, or just to expect a delay in their parts, so they know that they should sign up for more tasks other times to make up for it. They determine, "Well, what's the main goal of this? Are we trying to help the external organization do A or B? How are we focusing this?" They write a team charter. They define roles. You have an editor and a project manager.

(45:59):

The project manager reminds people of internal deadlines that they've come up with, a task schedule. They create a valuation form. I ask them, "What would you like to be? What skills of teamwork do you think are most important?" Then like halfway through, and then at the end, they rate each other. Are they contributing to the team? Is there a chance for them to give feedback? They can kick someone off the team, if they're not contributing, if they've ghosted them, vote them off the island because they're not fulfilling-

Clara (46:28):

I love all of this. I want to take this class. That sounds great. I wish I had more control. I would [inaudible 00:46:34] class.

Haley (46:35):

It's half the semester. It starts about in the spring. It starts after spring break. They start working together until the last week. They come up with a recommendation report together, which is a big, long thing. They're always like, "Oh, I can't believe we wrote so much." Then they go back to working individually, and do a video presentation, because it's an online course. If I was an in-person, I'd probably just make them do an actual oral presentation. But they have to do a video presentation individually, as if they were going to a meeting representing their group's project. Then if they haven't contributed to the group's project, it's another layer of accountability, because they can't make a video about what they did, if they have no idea what their teammates were doing.

(47:11):

Anyway, that's the main thing about online group work, is teaching them project management kind of things. One good resource for that is Team Writing by Joanna Wolfe. It's a nice little book that you can read and pull out the important stuff for them. If they set up the expectations at the beginning, they set up the schedule and determine all that documentation. I tell them to do agendas and minutes and things like that too. They have to do, at minimum, you have to meet three times synchronously like this, but most of it you can do asynchronously. "Okay, I did the research. Here's what I've got." A person could comment on it later in the day. Yeah.

Facilitator (47:56):

Building group work into my online teaching has been a fairly recent-ish development for me. To echo, [Haley], much of what you're saying, I feel like making as explicit as possible the expectations for the group really helps. I am completely guilty of not teaching people how to do group work, and then just putting them into groups and hoping they could figure it out. Which some of them kind of did, but most of them didn't. Which I thought was their fault for a long time. But it's clearly my fault. It's not fair to do.

Haley (48:27):

I mean, they've been thrown into groups and expected to do group work since they were in elementary school, and no one ever teaches them how, right?

Facilitator (48:33):

I know. I know.

Haley (48:34):

Project management, it's a great skill.

Facilitator (48:37):

The heartening or disheartening thing is that, in my student feedback, I will often get comments like, "I was surprised that I did group work in an online class. I've never done that before." Or, "I wasn't looking forward to it, but it really was a good opportunity to meet my classmates," even if they never met synchronously together, which I encourage, but not require, because of the time zone thing and all that stuff. But it does give them a sense to humanize the course a little bit, going back to what we talked about right at the beginning.

(49:10):

I find it really rewarding that they seem to like the group work for the most part, once it's all said and done. But by the same token, I can't tell you how many times it's like, "I've never done this before in all the online classes I've taken." So it does feel like something that is not getting pushed out, in my neck of the woods in the way like, [Haley], you had talked about. Not just doing the best practice or effective practice for you, but making sure that's shared out as a resource in your department, or your sort of pod of the organization. Right?

Haley (49:42):

Yeah.

Clara (49:44):

Yeah. I typed out, I think that's the one thing that hasn't changed. I think a lot of other things have changed, but ever since I started, really the only interaction that students get is discussions, online discussions in some way. Sometimes they're video Flipgrids or whatever, but for the most part, it's not, because it's just not. So group discussions and peer reviews, I would love to see I think more of that, because it doesn't exist. But then my question is, who's training you on how to do this? Because I got zero. Everything I do is just like, I was in a class and they did this, and that was pretty cool or whatever. [Haley], where are you learning all these cool things?

Haley (50:24):

Our college has a Center for Teaching Excellence.

Clara (50:28):

That must be nice.

Haley (50:28):

It's a resource for faculty to come, like you can sign up for professional development seminars.

Clara (50:34):

We have one, but it's not for online. You have to go in person.

Meghan (50:38):

We have-

Haley (50:38):

Well our is, you can go in person and then they talk about online stuff, right?

Meghan (50:44):

Yeah.

Clara (50:45):

Yeah. We don't live anywhere-

Haley (50:46):

We have a couple of seminars you can do online, but that was just new since 2020. Yeah.

Meghan (50:51):

We have something called [seminar name], which in [language] means a taste of. So our little [seminar name]s are 30 minute conversations. For example, tomorrow the librarian will come in and say, "These are all the things that are new that have changed between spring and now. These are things we can do." Then teach people how to set it up.

Haley (51:17):

We also have pedagogy brown bags. Everyone just brings their lunch, and we sit around and talk for an hour about a specific aspect of pedagogy. Those are usually hosted by, we have a... I am the coordinator for composition rhetoric course one, and the coordinator for all the different multi-section writing. People take turns saying, "Okay, we're going to talk about this," and finding people who have done it before. Then everyone just gets together and you talk about it, you exchange ideas and things.

Clara (51:44):

Those are in person, my situation-

Haley (51:47):

Some of them are in person. Some of them are on Zoom. We've done it both ways in the past few years.

Clara (51:51):

Okay. My campus, I would say, is very on-campus. Again, it's just a misunderstanding. It's very on-campus centered, where they want people to come in on-campus for the training. But most of the people who teach online don't live near campus. So it's like, great, you can come in. And the stuff that they put on Zoom is incredibly general, and there's nothing cool, like how can you... It's, "We paid a lot of money for this piece of software that you might never need or use, or is incredibly helpful, but here, here's how you might use it." Then you have to apply to put it in your class, and maybe we say we'll give you the money for it, and maybe we won't. But it's very, I don't know, the ability that I feel like I have to get online training in something cool that is very different.

Haley (52:33):

Well, like you were talking about, "Here's a piece of software." We have a different office besides the Center for Teaching Excellence. It's the Office of [inaudible 00:52:40]-

Facilitator (52:40):

Software Excellence.

Haley (52:41):

... or something like that.

Clara (52:42):

Yeah.

Haley (52:42):

They are the people who try to sell you things like Peerceptiv and Turnitin, and that kind of thing, right? Yeah. It's a different office. Yeah. My school's very large.

Clara (52:56):

I feel like that's so lucky. I don't know. Do I need to move to wherever you are? Because, I don't know. I feel like that's a unique opportunity. I'm super glad that you have that as an opportunity, because that class sounds amazing.

Haley (53:09):

Well and you mentioned being grad-

Clara (53:09):

And like that thing I've never heard of before in an online class, honestly.

Haley (53:12):

You mentioned being a grad student, and we have a required pedagogy class that our grad students have to take as they teach. It covers, not a lot of in-depth stuff, but it covers the scaffolding and all the basics of education. But then it also talks about what are practical realities of teaching online, and teaching with students who have various disabilities, and all that kind of stuff.

Clara (53:33):

Did you have to take that?

Haley (53:35):

No, but I can sit in on it, if I want to.

Facilitator (53:41):

Well, just in the interests of time, again, a great discussion, but I don't want to keep anybody too much longer-

Haley (53:48):

Yeah, I actually have a meeting three minutes ago.

Facilitator (53:49):

... than our prescribed 30 minutes, which I think we've gone over very productively. Obviously, I will send a follow-up email, just thanking everybody. You'll get a link of some kind to the Amazon gift card. It's all digital obviously. But certainly, I would encourage folks to follow up with [Haley] in particular, who could maybe teach us how to do this stuff.

Clara (54:09):

I want to see all of those materials. Just send me the whole, just invite me to your class.

Haley (54:14):

I don't mind sending you all the materials. I'll share Google-

Clara (54:17):

I'm going to write you an email right now.

Haley (54:18):

Okay.

Clara (54:18):

But you have a meeting, so we've got to go.

Haley (54:22):

Yeah.

Facilitator (54:22):

Let me just sign off by thanking you all for a really interesting and productive discussion. Thanks so much for your time.

Meghan (54:27):

Thank you.

Clara (54:28):

Thank you so much. That was fun.

Haley (54:28):

Thank you. It was fun to meet you.

Facilitator (54:30):

Have a great rest of your day.

## Focus Group 5: Paula, Sylvia, & Moe

Facilitator (00:05):

The most nerve-racking part of these is will they show up? And then did I remember to record? And then is my computer going to crash during that processing recording part where it all is just lost to history? Other than that, they're really enjoyable. Okay.

(00:23):

I'll just pose or offer this first prompt. Could any of you talk about your challenges and/or successes related to your current OWI work, whatever form that happens to be taking, and I'm happy to open the floor to anyone who'd like to jump in on that.

Paula (00:47):

I've been teaching online for probably seven years or something like that, and when I first started, it was pretty restricted. We only had asynchronous courses. It was only certain courses that were offered. You got the sense that it was sort of the professors didn't want to offer online classes, but the administration wanted us to.

(01:12):

And I will say that the first time I did it, I did get training, but it was not super successful. And I had that experience that I think many of us had where like, oh my gosh, the success level and the persistence level was a lot less than I had been used to in face-to-face courses. But I'll say that over the years, it's gotten a lot better as I've become more experienced and learned more about teaching online.

Facilitator (01:41):

Could you say more about that early professional development or how maybe that's changed because that is a recurring theme that we see in so much of our survey work and conversations that we have?

Paula (01:54):

It's been a little while, so my memory's a bit fuzzy, but my memory was that in order to teach online, it was required that we go through our university's training that went through our teaching support office, and I believe I got a small stipend for doing it. I believe I did get paid for doing that training, although we don't get paid extra for developing online courses.

(02:23):

And the way it worked was that they had two different versions of this training. One was for people who were teaching courses that had already been developed. And so in theory, there was a shell in our LMS that you went into, although I think it was for a first-year writing course and for first-year writing, we have a lot of freedom so I didn't use the shell at all. My pedagogy was totally different than whoever had done the training three years ago or something. So I actually did develop it, my own course, myself. And I think I was trying to rely on what other people had advised me, that just wasn't my style of pedagogy, so it was a bit of a struggle until I trusted myself and did what I thought was best.

(03:15):

And then there was a second training where it was four people who developed an original course that I went through for a different course and I believe I also got a small stipend for doing that as well.

Sylvia (03:32):



I would say my training was very minimal and it was very similar to yours. I feel like there was a weird little shell I had to do some stuff in, like learn how to upload some crap or something dumb. And let's just say I've been at constant odds with every single instructional designer we've ever had because they're just so... I think they're just so rooted in some kind of traditional look at online writing and I ended up kind of training myself.

(04:04):

So in 2006, I think I went through something and then I came across, I think the book, it's an OER textbook or an OER book, I should say, that's called Foundations of Writing Instruction or something. It's a big, fat guy, but it's the best. I read through it one summer. Did that come out way after? I can't even remember when that came out. I don't even know if you guys know what I'm talking about, but it's this big book of the foundations of writing or something. The cover is very simplistic, but I read through it and it was just so helpful. I was like, "Why wasn't this around when I first started this?" There we go. It was so amazing. It really helped me.

(04:42):

I would say my struggles, not only with the lack of really good quality training on our campus probably, is that the perspectives of people thinking that it's just so easy to do it or whatever. We have administration who actually, now I know COVID is still existing, but they're kind of pushing more and more face-to-face now because they say the students want that when my online classes filled the fastest. So it's very strange. I feel like I'm dealing with... I'm not dealing with any problems with my students online anymore. It's all everybody else surrounding the classes that drive me crazy.

(05:26):

And I would say that my persistence rate really improved greatly after I probably read that book, after I switched to, I don't know if you guys have heard of the new, it's kind of a theory, practice of ungrading where you look at how students are learning and really kind of... I've become so much less harsh with them and my due dates are so much more flexible. So students are completing my course easier or it's not becoming a chore to take online from [Sylvia].

(05:57):

And again, that becomes me against the faculty because when I tell them how I'm teaching it, "Oh, you're not rigorous. Oh, you're not this." And I'm like, "But my students are passing and they're learning." And to them... I know that passing doesn't always mean learning so I should probably backtrack on that just a minute. But I know my students are learning whether whatever, because I have them reflect a ton. I think you guys have probably heard all that stuff.

(06:24):

So those are probably some of my issues. And I was just going to bring up, I think [Paula] touched on this, but the shells, they want us to be very consistent with what our shells look like, and the ego in me is like, "Well, mine are very, very organized." I get constantly complimented from my students that I'm very organized. So I'm like, "Well, everybody should just follow my decisions." I'm kind of a dick about it. I'm like, "Well, I'm doing it right. So you guys just get on board. I mean, my students have had no complaints, so whatever." But yeah, I've kind of got an ego about that stuff.

(06:57):

And then the LMSs themselves, now that I've switched to ungrading, we're using Blackboard Ultra and I want to just bash my head into a wall because it's just not set up to give my students the feed... It doesn't give them feedback. They have to click 17 buttons before they find my feedback for one, which drives me up...

(07:15):

Anyway, so I wanted to throw in a couple more things, but also piggyback on what [Paula] had said just about I don't think my issues are the students. They're fine. It's everybody else's fingers having to

get into my stuff. And so I don't mean to sound so cranky. It's just when I start talking about Blackboard, I can feel my blood pressure, it's just... I hate it so much and I try not to let my students know that I just detest it. It's the fire and fury.

(07:41):

Anyway, those are my two cents. Don't know if that helps anybody, but yeah.

Moe (07:47):

I love telling my students how much I hate Blackboard because they get it. None of them like it either.

Sylvia (07:59):

It's supposed to be so intuitive and it just really isn't. Every ID I have, they're like, "Oh, it's so functional." I'm like, "To who? Have you seen Facebook? Facebook's more..." I mean, I know that they're not using Facebook, but Facebook's more intuitive. Whatever.

Moe (08:15):

I once used Facebook as an LMS substitute, a private Facebook group. It was for an ESL course so I didn't have access to a traditional LMS, but I'm like, "I could create a private Facebook group," and in a lot of ways, it was a lot more functional than Blackboard.

(08:39):

I do though want to pull back to the, I guess, the question of training. My department in my institution is very against online instruction. [My large, public institution in the Northeast] is like 25 separate schools. It's two-year colleges, senior colleges. Almost all the colleges have had online composition courses for a decade or more. My particular institution never did until COVID. And then when the pandemic ended, which when our president decided that it ended, she also said and she had previously, pre-COVID, she wanted to expand online offerings.

(09:34):

The moment we all shut down in March of 2020, all she wanted to do was be in person. It's like the previous 15 years of her tenure had not existed. And so when we came back, she mandated that departments could not offer online courses if they had not offered them pre-pandemic. So my department could not offer online courses because they had never offered online courses. It was bizarre. So there are some departments that had always offered online courses and who still are, and my department could not, unless there were medical accommodations for the faculty members.

(10:20):

So I was teaching online for a year and now I'm not because I can't. Some of my colleagues, they can't at this institution, but they still are at our sibling institutions. It's very bizarre. And I think there's a very strong anti-online sentiment, certainly within the English Department here, but I think throughout a lot of the faculty here, I think a lot of them were scarred by the pandemic and they keep conflating the remote instruction that we all were forced into and that students were forced into in 2020, 2021 with online instruction, which predates the pandemic. So that's sort of my weird situation.

(11:13):

In our writing center, we do a lot of things online. We do over video and asynchronous. We're apparently the only unit in my whole school that offers asynchronous assistance to students, which was news to me when an assistant dean told me that a few weeks ago. But in terms of teaching, I haven't done it in over a year, almost two years.

(11:45):

But the training was interesting because when the pandemic hit, my college and generally the university system started offering some of those training courses over the summer, which were stipended, but I couldn't attend any of them because I got tapped to lead one. I had never taught online before, but at that point, I'd been the director of my writing center for a whole year and we had a director of our writing course curriculum who had been in place for a year and a half or two years. So our associate provost for faculty development was like, "Why don't the two of you lead a course in writing instruction?" And we were like, "Okay? We don't know what we're doing," but neither did anybody else in our institution.

(12:37):

So yeah, that was my experience in summer of 2020 is the two of us, [colleague] and I, we made up writing instruction online. And every week, we were reading tons of books. I think Flower Darby saved my life, among other people, just reading up on how to teach online and then we were sort of paraphrasing that for our colleagues. So it's a miracle that anyone learned anything or taught anything because people who knew nothing were leading the pack.

(13:14):

So I don't know if that's helpful, but that was my experience and I'm realizing I'm still scarred.

Sylvia (13:22):

[Moe], that sounds kind of... Well, we didn't have you, like a clone of you at all, but we were all kind of wandering around. I had taught... I think I was one of a couple on campus who had experience going back to 2006. So I kind of tried to help out my department, and I do recall one Zoom meeting that we all had, and everybody was like, "I can't do this. This online," they kept saying, "this online teaching isn't for me." And I'm like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. This isn't online teaching, you guys. This is emergency fricking shit-show. This is not online teaching. This is..." Oh, I just realized that's going to be in the transcript. Sorry, I swore. But I was like, "This isn't it. This isn't it."

(14:04):

And so anytime somebody still brings up, "Online teaching is horrible," I'm like, "but you've never been trained properly. COVID was not... I barely got trained properly in my..." I'm like, "I've seen a well-done course and I know that that person probably went through a lot of training to get there. I don't think..." Oh my gosh.

(14:27):

Question for you, [Moe]. So I know why we were pushed to come back face-to-face because we have residence halls and they wanted the money from the students for the food court and all that stuff. Are you residential? Is that why they wanted to push? No? See, that's weird to me because I knew that it was capitalism. They wanted the students in the res halls to pay for the buildings. That doesn't make sense. So I'm wondering what her angle was on that. That's really weird.

Moe (14:56):

None of us know. None of us know. We all speculate what her motives were because she had been pushing for expansion of online before. I think, and this is guessing, that she recognized that for a lot of our students, and a lot of our students are first gen, working class, a lot of people who don't have good tech at home and don't have a lot of... In [my large city], no one has space at home. One of my tutors, I could see when he was tutoring at home, I could see his background. He was in a car. He would go to his family's car, sit in the car, tap into the wifi in the house because he didn't have private space.

(15:40):

And I think that she recognized that for a lot of the students, online was technologically difficult or socially difficult or for varied other things, and so she wanted to be the race to be the most in-person because she's serving our students. Even though I think, as you said, the courses that we do offer online, they are the first to fill, always are. So the university as a whole did a survey of our students and more than half said that they wanted fully in person, but that means almost half said that they really wanted remote and it wasn't like... More than half wasn't 75; more than half turned out to be 51. We finally got the numbers even later.

Sylvia (16:30):

Well, I'm impressed that you surveyed because we're just told anecdotally, "Oh, they want to be back." And I'm like, "What? You heard from two people who don't like to be at home?" Come on.

Moe (16:39):

They surveyed I think because they were expecting a different answer.

Sylvia (16:46):

Oh, a scam. Right?

Moe (16:46):

Yeah, right. They were expecting a different answer because especially our community college enrollments had really crashed. So I think they were expecting that everyone really wanted to be on campus. And it turns out 51 did and 49 didn't. So yeah, good for them.

(17:05):

So I don't know. Yeah, our situation was weird, but I just do want to say just in terms of teaching myself, I was very fortunate that I ended up teaching the exact same course three semesters or four semesters in a row. And so even from that spring of 2020, I had a course I'd been teaching through online and whatever, slapped something together to make it work. And I chose asynchronous actually because I knew I had three students who were parents and I didn't have to survey them. I knew that they were solely going to be their teachers or teacher's assistants, and there was no way they were going to attend an 11:00 AM class on Zoom. I didn't even know Zoom then, but I knew there was no way so I just made everything asynchronous. I had no idea what I was doing.

(17:58):

I read PARS, a case I'm sure you're familiar with. I read that so many times the first few months to try to teach myself. But then I taught the same course Fall 2020, Spring '21, Fall '20. And it was like, "Oh, thank God," because I was able to iterate the course. And by the third semester, it was actually a pretty good asynchronous course. When I finally showed it to some instructional designers that I'm friendly with, they were like, "Oh, this is really good. Can we show it to other people?" I'm like, "Yeah. I mean, as long as you're showing them as an example of something that's good and not terrible. Sure. I'm not showing you my first one. You can see the third one."

(18:44):

But if I had been forced to teach other courses where I had to teach myself how to teach this course online and teach myself how to teach that course online and teach myself how to teach the third course online, they would've been terrible. I'm an adjunct. I don't pick my courses, they get picked for me, but I got really, really lucky that I got to teach the same thing over and over and over again. And the first time that I got assigned a different course was my first semester back in person and I had taught that course in person so I didn't have to reinvent it. I was like, "Lucky me," because I would've struggled a lot.

(19:29):

So I do think that, to go back to the training, I think the training is really, really important because if you have to do it yourself, and I did it myself, it just takes so long. It always takes time to teach a new course, to invent a new course. It always takes a certain degree of iteration. But at this point, I'm a fairly experienced teacher. If I'm assigned a new course, it will be decent the very first time I do it, as opposed to terrible the first time I do it.

(20:01):

And I think that that's, for me, the challenge of teaching online or teaching remotely, I don't like to say that I taught online in 2020, was that I had to teach myself how to do it. And it was fairly terrible. And it took me a long time and a lot of uncompensated time to teach myself how to do it decently and semi-effectively. I'm not even saying very effectively.

(20:32):

And I think similar to you said something about the students, the students, that's also... I think that's whether students are opting in to online for economic reasons or convenience, if they're opting in to it, they come with a very different expectation than if they didn't opt in, if it was foisted upon them. They understand that they will need a certain amount of technology. Especially if it's asynchronous, they generally understand that they have to pace themselves to a large degree in a very different way than a traditional class or even a synchronous class.

(21:16):

So they know they're going to have to do the discussion boards or whatever the things are. They come in with that expectation, so I think that the persistence, the problems with persistence are quite different than if it's foisted upon them. And so I think-

Paula (21:31):

Just be... Oh, sorry.

Moe (21:31):

Oh, yeah. I wasn't-

Paula (21:36):

I was just piggybacking off of that too, now they've all had experience with online courses, at least in our part of the country, all our school shut down. So whether it was high school or previous university experience, they know whether or not it worked for them during the pandemic. And so yeah, that's a big difference too. So when they're opting out, they know, "This does not work for me. I'm not doing it."

Sylvia (22:00):

I've often viewed... I'm a big proponent of the hybrid because we have people on campus who think the students need the traditional Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and years ago, I had some DSEL technician students who just didn't want to show up at three o'clock on a Friday. I didn't either, but I was there. So they argued that they should just be able to do stuff online and that sort of thing. So my colleague and I who were teaching these three o'clock Friday classes got together. I had gone to a couple of TYCA, Two-Year College English Association, sessions about hybrids, learned about how to structure them.

(22:40):

And now I think we're getting pushback for other reasons, but people are like, "Oh no, the students don't like hybrids." And I'm like, "Actually, you are not talking to your students because every time I

have a DSEL student in class and I ask them if they're okay with not having class on Friday, but doing things online, they say that they would love to do that."

(22:56):

So it's again, the whole people making assumptions about what students want without talking to them that drives me a little nuts too. There's a lot of things that drive me nuts. So I guess maybe I need to do some reflection on that.

(23:09):

But anyway, I think for me, the reason I brought up the hybrid thing is I've noticed that it's kind of the gateway drug to them realizing they can handle online because they'll have me for English 110, the first sequence of the freshmen comp. They'll have my hybrid Monday, Wednesday, and they'll kind of say, "Well, what do you teach next semester for 120?" And I'll say, "Well, it's fully online, but I think you can handle it because you were able to handle my hybrid. You're going to see me less, but you know how I structured my online class." And so a lot of them will take me again, even though they really don't want to, but they're like, "Oh, I was able to handle [Sylvia]..."

(23:45):

So I feel like if you structure a hybrid really well or an online, they'll do all right. And you're right though, I think some of them know from COVID or from whatever that they can't handle it. And that's fine. Maybe a hybrid is better for them because then they still get the flexibility and the face-to-face. So I like the fact that it's the in between.

(24:05):

Yeah, there was something else I was going to say about the online thing, but now I lost my train. It's all good. But yeah, I like those hybrids. I love them a lot.

Moe (24:16):

[Paula], I really wanted to ask you about, I guess, the experiences of some of those students coming out of the pandemic because you're right, in our part of the country, they were also online. But I think for a lot of them, that spooked them from online because I think this goes back to what [Sylvia] was saying. That wasn't really online instruction. It was some emergency... What was the technical term you used? Shit-show? Yeah, shit-show.

Sylvia (24:46):

Yes, a big shit-show.

Moe (24:52):

It was. And I know that at my writing center, if my staff is here, we allow our staff to work remotely some days, but if our staff is here, we let students opt in to online or here because it's literally a button they push. So why not? And I've had students who say, "Oh, no, no, not online. No, no!" They're so spooked, and then a week later they're online and they're fine because it's one-on-one, not a class.

(25:21):

But I think you're right. I think some students did it and they realized they could do it, and I think other students hated it. And they're very similar to faculty who hated it and without realizing that, no, this was a poorly designed emergency thing rather than a well-planned and well-thought-out experience. So I guess I don't have a sense of the proportion. I have a better sense of the proportion of faculty who feel that somehow fall of 2020 was representative of online instruction. I don't have a sense of students feeling whether that was representative and the degree to which they're opting in or out.

(26:10):

Again, I think obviously every time we offer online courses, they fill up instantly, so there are many students clearly who feel they can do it, they like it, they prefer it for whatever reasons, and I'm just wondering about the students who felt burned by it, if that makes sense. And I don't have any sense of the proportion.

Paula (26:27):

Yeah, I don't have numbers, so I'll say a couple of things. One is anecdotally talking with students and kind of doing solely informal surveys and stuff like that with them, they're kind of aware of different types of courses and what would be good for them online versus not. So they know, "Okay, if it's just a lecture course in a lecture hall, I'm going to take that online. Why would I take that in person?" And they have talked to me about, "If this is a core course for my major, maybe I'm more likely to want to take it in person."

(27:06):

And so sometimes that means, "So you're a first-year writing class, I'm not going to take that. To me, that's just... Let's do it online because it's not one of my core courses. It's not important to me," which I have feelings about. Or on the other hand, they're like, "Well, a writing course, this is," they don't use the word seminar-style, "but this is a discussion-based course, and it's interactive and collaborative. And so that does seem like something I should do in person."

(27:32):

The other thing I'll say is that I teach flex courses, so those ones where some of your students are in the room and some of them are online. And the modality that I teach it in, they can choose every class. You could show up one day in person and then switch to online and back and forth. And so we did a couple of surveys of them when we were first launching that in first-year writing. And at that time, and it was sort of as we were just coming back from the pandemic, a lot of what they said, the people who selected that modality, was that they prefer in-person, but they recognized that flexibility to go online in case they were sick was really valuable.

(28:18):

This was also, I will say, I forget exactly when that was, but it was the fall where we were like, "Oh, things are better," but then Omicron hit and we were coming back in the fall and we're like, "Oh my gosh, everything's terrible again." So they were kind of like, "Well, I might get sick. I just know I might get sick this term. And so I want to have that flex in case." So at least at that time, they were coming in, "In-person is better, but I want that option to come online."

(28:46):

And then they also had this, they're sort of... And I sympathize with this because this is totally what I would've done as an undergrad. At the beginning, they're in person and by the end, it's more and more online. And they're like, "I know I should come in person. It's better but it's raining," or whatever. Or mental health. Mental health was a big one, a big one for why people were like, "I need that online option because there are days when I cannot make it to campus, but maybe I can log in."

Facilitator (29:17):

[Paula], can I ask you quickly if your model of flex includes both an asynchronous option as well, or is it just synchronous Zoom or whatever, plus a synchronous face-to-face classroom?

Paula (29:32):

In our writing, and I think in humanities in general, those asynchronous sections or whatever is not offered, but the model exists at [my large, four-year, private, not-for-profit institution in a large

Midwestern city]. So there's maybe somewhere at [my institution] where they've got in-person and Zoom and asynchronous students in one section. And if they made me do that, I'd make them pay me for multiple sections. So I would not do that.

Sylvia (29:59):

When we came back in '20, we weren't remote for very long. [My large, four-year, public institution in the northern Midwest is in] a very red state, so they were like, "Ah, you guys can get sick. It's fine." We came back in 2020, fall, we were masked up. Although we had some students who of course didn't think they needed to be masked up because it's not a real thing, whatever, lots of conspiracy theorists. That was fun.

(30:20):

But what I had done for the hyflex that fall, and I think the following spring, was I tried to do in-person and synchronous, ended up recording myself a lot, which I found out later students thought was kind of a podcast. A student who had me this semester after said, "Oh, I loved it because you recorded yourself so I would clean my house while my kids were napping and I would listen to you and you were..." I'm like, "I podcasted myself? How did I? It's amazing."

(30:44):

But now I'm teaching, like this coming spring, I kind of moved away from the synchronous stuff because it got to be so stressful to walk into the classroom and have to worry about the online students and the face-to-face. So I've moved to my hyflex, what I proposed to my boss last fall, and now it worked really well last spring for children's lit and for my creative writing. Because we are so rural in [my state], I'm in situated in [a town], which is south of [a larger city], and not only are we rural, but we don't have a lot of staff who can teach somebody to take over the online and somebody to take over the face-to-face. We probably don't even have enough students to fill two of those anyway. So that's why I proposed it to him to teach those classes in that capacity.

(31:31):

So yes, my two... I had an online cohort and a face-to-face cohort for both creative writing and children's literature. And so we've been talking about COVID, and then this helped me with climate change because I had so many softball players who had to miss. They were practicing in [a neighboring state] because they have a dome over there or something. They were also going to [another neighboring state]. We don't have any facilities nearby that can have a softball field in a dome. So they had to... I think my softball players were gone 20 days to go practice. So it worked really well. And I say climate change because we had a crazy amount, we canceled so many days. Last winter was traumatic, and our new president is from [the Southwest], so I think he was like, "What the hell?" I'm like, "Yeah, this is [the northern Midwest]. Sorry."

(32:23):

So it really worked well having that hyflex thing because they just couldn't be in my class. They were gone all the time. And then I'm glad you mentioned mental health because a couple of them were dealing with... So having that option to go online, I don't think a lot of them wanted to be gone that often, but how my class was set up worked really well for them. When they were here, they wanted to be in class and see me and see their classmates. And then when they were gone, they could still kind of participate in things because I made sure they would all see each other online all the time through discussions and that sort of thing.

(32:56):

Man, that hyflex thing though, I think that's the way for some rural schools to go is if you want to fill up a class, offer it. If you can figure out how to make it not so stressful on the faculty member because like you said, [Paula], if I would've been doing it synchronously, I'd be asking for extra.



There's too much stress on me in the classroom. I want to go there, see them, but then I'll go online and check on everybody who's doing the online cohort piece.

(33:18):

And I think the students face-to-face even liked the fact that they were discussing with people face-to-face, but then they'd go online and meet some other people. So it's kind of like they had two different groups of people who they could get to know through creative writing and children's lit.

(33:31):

So I think when I explain it to other faculty, they're like, "How's this work?" I'm like, "Just..." It's really hard to have them see it from the student perspective or see the benefits of it, but whenever you can give them flexibility, man, that just works out so well. I just really... And being accessible.

(33:50):

Anyway, I don't need to preach to you guys, but yeah, that's how I went from the synchronous to the, "No, no, no, no. I'm doing asynchronous plus face-to-face."

Paula (33:59):

So yeah, I do it synchronous, and they've invested some money in this. We have these classrooms with cameras and there's a camera on me, there's cameras on the students, they're mic'd, there's big screens in the room so you can see the Zoom people. And they also give us what they call an online learning assistant, or an OLA, which is a student worker who attends via Zoom, but does things for me like puts people in breakout rooms, shares links. They're kind of just there. The technology's a little bit, even once you do it, you always have this moment. You're like, "Wait, it's a touchscreen. What's happening?" And you've done this six times, but today you can't remember. And you're like, "Wait, how do I use a whiteboard again?" And they're like, "Oh, yeah," and they talk you through it.

(34:45):

So I always talk about it as a offloading of some of the mental load of the synchronous. I cannot be in the online space, be in the face-to-face space, but also manage things on Zoom that I know how to do but there's just too many... It's a cognitive overload. And so that, I advocate for. If anyone's thinking at my institution, I'm like, "They're going to offer you an OLA, get it. Just ask for the OLA. They get paid some amount of money, they're a student worker, and even though you know how to do breakout rooms, in the moment when someone's asking you a question and you're trying to do the breakout rooms and you're trying to share your slides, it's a lifesaver. It's a lifesaver."

(35:27):

So I don't know, tell your institutions, get some student workers to offload your cognitive load onto.

Facilitator (35:36):

Not to put too fine a point on it, but the sharing that you just did or the description of that very like... I've never heard of that particular position before. That shared out to whoever might read the research that grows out of these conversations, that's a game-changer maybe for a department, an institution. That's really great stuff.

(35:58):

So I want to be conscious of time and I'll ask what would've been my next follow-up. But I'm going to ask it at the end now because you've actually already all answered this question. So the question is just how, if at all, has your OWI changed over the last however many years, including pandemic effects.

(36:19):

And so rather than have you revisit that, I would maybe open it up because you've all sort of talked about how things have evolved for you, how you've trial and error and self-taught, I've not so shamelessly plugged all of the books that I have either chapters in or written, just FYI, in the chat there. Could you point to anything pedagogically or design-wise, another kind of nugget that you could provide to colleagues in the field here about how your teaching has changed, your design has changed that's really been, again, that high-impact kind of game-changer for students?

(36:57):

And it sort of goes back to what [Sylvia] had said, far less now than ever do I feel like students, as users of this learning experience, are the root of the problem. It's all of the other noise coming from different kinds of places.

Sylvia (37:15):

I think my best nugget to give anybody would be, if faculty are about to get trained on this or if they are seeking training or whatever, before they make judgment, they should take a well-designed class. And I say that because in the summer of... I waited way too long to do it. It should have been assigned to me to actually go take one. But I don't know if you guys are familiar with the Creative Commons. I love that whole organization. They offer the Creative Commons Certification Course for Educators. I took it in the summer of 2019. It was the best \$500 I've ever spent. I probably could have got the school to pay for it, but I just thought I would do it myself. And that's when I went, "Oh my gosh, this is well... I get it. This is how it's supposed to be."

(37:59):

And not only did I understand the content they were trying to teach me, but I started to pick up on multiple-attempt quizzes. Why am I not allowing my students to do this? I'm learning by going back and taking the quiz over myself, so I learned... It just blew my brains. And then I also got very involved on Twitter, and I know Twitter's starting to die or whatever, but getting on social media and finding groups of people who have... I found my ungraders that summer and I went, "Oh my God." So I had a lot of epiphanies that were uncomfortable, but the game-changer truly for me was that Creative Commons class. Oh my gosh. So well-done. I mean, it was probably not 100% perfect, but man. Oh.

(38:46):

Whoever they are, however they're doing their training, I would love... Yeah. I just wanted to throw that out there because I was amazed by it.

Facilitator (38:55):

And I'll editorialize here. I feel like the president at [Moe's] institution needs to take a well-designed online class because I have a feeling that so many of the deciders have never actually experienced it, and thus face-to-face remains the only gold standard there could possibly be.

Paula (39:21):

One thing that I do is a lot of screencasting, including screencasting my feedback on writing, which is something that I think makes a huge difference to students in presence, particularly in asynchronous courses. So obviously, you do screencast for your lectures, but that feedback, and I've had a lot of students respond like, "Oh my gosh, you know I'm a person." You know what I mean? And that makes a big difference to them.

(39:54):

So I do a lot of screencasting and I've actually had the experience, like one term I didn't do it because I was coming back from maternity leave and then I just was like, "Ah, I'm just going to write it," and my course evaluations went down. It's like, "Okay, the screencasting, I think it makes a big difference."

Moe (40:13):

I guess mine would go back to the LMS problem. LMSs are terrible, they're just... And one of the things that I think when I started, I was using something that wasn't part of our LMS, but it was officially a plugin for our LMS and it was a video thing, which I hated and my students hated it. And I switched within a week to Flipgrid, which is now Flip. And there's an app for that. And it's really easy to use. And instead of discussion boards, I use Padlet, which I can just embed, and it's really easy to use and there's an app.

(40:52):

And I think for me that has been... Alternatives to the LMS, especially if they come in app form, if they're doing the same things, especially when I was fully remote and we were asynchronous, I wanted my students to see each other's faces and hear each other's voices so I wanted them to do a little video reaction. Instead of writing something, talk to me for a minute or two.

(41:18):

The thing that was not quite native but more native in Blackboard Learn was terrible and Flip was so easy for me, for them. Padlet is so easy for me for them. There are so many free alternatives, so many free alternatives that are just honestly easy for students to use, easy for faculty to use. It doesn't take a lot of training to learn how to use either. If you can find things that are just easier than what's officially supported by whoever made the technology buying decision at your institution who almost certainly doesn't have to use the technology, that is such a lifesaver and it made the courses better.

Facilitator (42:19):

So again, more as an aside, I just shared out another link, which happens to be my current Comp 1 class, and I will probably edit this out of the transcript just because, but I've gone whole-hog Padlet. It's just like everything is there for all the reasons [Moe] just enumerated.

Moe (42:39):

It's your LMS.

Facilitator (42:40):

It is, right. The grades are still safely protected behind lots of button clicks in the real LMS, but the ones that students can actually use and enjoy is not that one.

(42:54):

So again, conscious of time. I'm happy to continue the discussion if there are maybe aspects of OWI, whether it's your work, the field writ large that we haven't really talked about that you feel are pressing, but again, super, super productive and engaging and interesting conversation. I wish it could go on, but I get that we've been at it for a while.

Paula (43:15):

Thank you. It was nice to meet everybody.

Moe (43:18):

Yeah, likewise. Thank you so much for bringing us together. [Paula] and [Sylvia], it's been really, really great learning from you, the two of you and [Facilitator]. Thank you for organizing this.

Paula (43:27):

Same here.

Sylvia (43:29):

Same here. I'm sorry I keep looking distracted, but somebody from our instructional technology department's coming to put the fancy Adobe Acrobat on my computer so I can do things to PDFs now. So I'm like, "I want him to come to do the thing!" It's my computer. I want to do cool stuff!

Facilitator (43:50):

Well, your life will be filled with fillable forms now that you have the fancy Adobe.

(43:56):

All right, well, thank you all for your time, your effort, your engagement. It's really great. I'll be in touch more immediately or within a shorter timeframe just with your Amazon gift card. So if you get a weird looking email from Amazon, that's obviously what it's going to be. And then otherwise, we have a few more of these that we're going to conduct with a few more groups. Scheduling, as you guys realize, is always a bit of a challenge, but then we'll hopefully be at a point where we can let everybody know that the conversations are done, the transcripts are available, and then it's sort of like next steps figuring out who might do what with all of that fascinating text that we've produced.

Moe (44:40):

All right, awesome.

Facilitator (44:42):

Have a great rest of your day everybody. Thanks again so much.

Paula (44:44):

Bye.

## Focus Group 6: Richard, Kendra, & Suzanne

Facilitator (00:07):

So everyone should have gotten that little pop-up about the recording that's happening. Then I will begin with this very open-ended question. If anybody would like to talk about challenges and/or successes related to your work in OWI, [Richard], this might be a good place for you to re-say some of what you were just talking about.

Richard (00:30):

Good. Yeah, sorry, I didn't realize that first part wasn't being recorded, but I'll try to go quickly in that. So I work at [a large, public, four-year institution in the Southeast U.S.]. We are a very brick-and-mortar place. I got here 18 years ago, and I remember even just asking to teach in a writing class, in a computer writing classroom. They said, "Oh, the kids who do that know how to get in there, you faculty don't need to worry about that stuff." So it was very, very, very, very face-to-face. So the story I told briefly before was that maybe about 10 years ago when our university went from 23 to 19 students in our first-year writing sequence, that was great for us, but we did not believe we had enough classroom space. We had the instructors, the TAs to do it, but not the classroom space. So we learned that we were going to have to move very rapidly to a large-scale OWI system that we were unprepared for.

(01:26):

There was no training or preparation for OWI before. It was just people who are talented, people like [Kendra] or people who are good with computers, they must be good with OWI as well, or if they were moving out of state or if they had health needs. So we had very small scale. All of a sudden, it was going to be large scale, and we needed to train 100 people to teach online. We avoided that crisis by finding 100 classrooms around campus, and so we didn't have to do this mass move to OWI. But because of a couple of really smart grad students and then my interest in OWI, we put together a grad seminar that we offered every summer, and then we put together a training, like a asynchronous training module for others who could go through based on that class. We just decided at that point that we wanted to train as many people as possible to be able to teach in OWI.

(02:26):

We also instituted in the composition program that if you wanted to teach at a distance for any reason that you had to have gone through the grad class or taken that modularized training. So all of this happened fortuitously just a year or so, year-and-a-half before COVID hit. So when we all had to massively shift online, we had more people here trained and prepared and really thinking through different kinds of synchronous and asynchronous instructional models, and they had done a lot of that training. So I feel very proud of the work that we did in our program during COVID even because we had dozens and dozens of people who had gone through this training and who were really invested in it. Then we helped others who were struggling to make that transition because it was all voluntary ahead of time. Of course, during COVID, none of online teaching was voluntary. We all had to shift to that direction.

Facilitator (03:28):

So I can just re-say the question, but again, feel free to jump in to piggyback, to respond, to elaborate. Again, just challenges, successes related to your OWI work.

Kendra (03:42):

So I can jump in a little bit. I'm curious too, as [Richard] was talking about how larger institutions mandate or put barriers in the process. So prior to 2019, 2020, [my institution, which is a campus of

a larger, public, four-year institution in the Southeast] was separately accredited, so we were a much smaller institution, and I ran our first-year writing program. As part of that, I helped train the folks that we had teaching in our first-year writing program. As part of a grant that I'd gotten back in 2004, no, not 2004, sometime in the past, but before the 20 teens, I got a grant to go to DMAC to think through how to set up our first-year writing courses to be able to be taught online, and I established those. Then one of the things that we did is we went through training with folks who wanted to be able to teach online, but not through everybody because we recognized that some people were better at teaching in a face-to-face environment than teaching in an online environment. So we wanted to provide that choice.

(05:08):

Because we were a small program, we were able to help those folks do whichever one that they wanted to do. Fast-forward, and now we are in a system where if we want to have a class online, it has to go through what on our campus is called [digital learning program name] where a faculty member works with [digital learning program name] to build out the course. Then that course is the course that gets used throughout the program. So we do this for our first-year writing courses. I forgot to mention that I am also responsible for the professional and technical undergraduate major, and that was through consolidation, became a fully online degree program. So each of those courses have been built out through [digital learning program name] with one person who may or may not have been a faculty member, that may have been a graduate student who built out those courses.

(06:15):

Now the expectation is that whoever teaches that course is now supposed to use that existing shell. So I'm curious about how other institutions are mandating that design process because I'm not sure, at least for us, and we are now a very big program, and I am used to working in that much smaller scale. I'm adapting, but it is a years-long adaptation, I think. But I'm curious about what other people are experiencing in terms of how a faculty member can develop an online course and the constraints and the affordances that you have with that versus asking someone else to provide that model for you, and then you're stuck with the course that has been built by someone else who may not have had 20 years looking at how online education has developed.

Facilitator (07:18):

Can I ask a quick question? When you say the shell or the template, the standardized course, is it fully developed with content material or is it more just a scaffolding that people would still have some degree of flexibility with?

Kendra (07:37):

That really depends on the course. So some of them are the whole thing. It is every piece of content. It is every discussion board question. It is the whole thing. Some of them, the modules have been laid out and the assignments have been laid out, and there is the at least stated observation that faculty members who are using that shell can change them. But in some cases, changing one piece changes everything for the experience. So change is permitted, but not necessarily possible.

Facilitator (08:25):

Okay. Thank you. Yeah, so the standardized course template, that is a hot button topic for sure. [Suzanne], did you want to jump in?

Suzanne (08:35):

Yeah, I have so much to say to everybody. [My large, public, four-year institution in the Midwest] was a very much in-person, on campus, just as [Richard] was saying, and so there were online

opportunities to teach online. In summer, we have a long January term just to accommodate students who went home or back to their home countries. I think faculty wanted to seek out how to teach online. There were those opportunities, but because we weren't really encouraged to do that, I think people were really caught off guard when COVID happened. So [my institution] actually gave us a two-week spring break to learn it all, just to give everybody that opportunity. So in that case where I got my PhD in [a Southwestern state] we were really, I felt at that point, really grateful that I had had that training and that experience 'cause I think it really, as we all know, it challenged everybody.

(09:59):

So I think the instinct for a lot of people was just to move their class synchronously online and not do a lot of the work into really integrating it and making it a, I don't want to say a useful experience, but something that could account for the affordances. Yeah, it's frustrating. It was really frustrating. I can imagine for a lot of people. But in probably the last year-and-a-half, we've basically abandoned online teaching. Everything is going back. There are certain circumstances where people... there's more opportunities for people to teach online if they want to. For example, I have a colleague who just had a baby, and so she's trying to use it to navigate back into the face-to-face. So it's a really interesting thing to look at how for a year-and-a-half we were, or not even a year-and-a-half, like a year, basically, we were maybe a year-and-a-half, really focused on trying to make these, I don't know, just maybe survive.

(11:23):

Maybe it wasn't even like people were trying to learn from it. It was just trying to survive and just this immediate shift back to... and I think that's a real missed opportunity to learn more about that. Especially with writing, I think people are so hesitant, like "Oh, writing, it's so time-consuming and it really..." Especially first-year writing, I think as I'm moving into my new role, first-year writing, there's a real hesitancy to do that online. It really seems to want to be... and I understand some of that concern with first year students. They don't even really understand what college is and to put them online, but at this point, that's all they know is online. So it seems like it would be an opportunity to really grasp that. But I have heard of universities, I have a friend who works in Oklahoma and they have to put all of their online classes through a supervisory process, making sure everything... Yeah, I feel lucky that [my institution] doesn't do that.

(12:44):

But I'm curious about that idea of a template because our department is working on doing a non-certificate technical writing, professional writing program. So we're developing these online asynchronous classes, and that's the thing is that we're just trying to develop these classes. So we were saying yesterday, "So if I make videos for this section, is that going to be videos for everybody who's teaching it at another time?" Which almost seems a little less authentic, so it is. It's this interesting thing where I think some of the challenges trying to save your time or save your energy or conserve your time, conserve your energy, but that isn't always maybe in service of the students. So to go back to the idea of challenges and successes, I think I've mentioned some of those challenges.

(13:57):

I think sometimes with students as well, when they move just into synchronous online, they weren't as prepared for the asynchronous. So I would get students completely admitting, "I forget we have this class sometimes," and so that was a struggle. Like, "You're online all the time. What are you talking about?" So that was a struggle. But I think some of those successes, I always feel like I get to know my students a little bit better online. I don't know if it just opens up more space for them to come and talk to me. I had way more students in office hours, and I really appreciate it. I think that's the exciting part, is just the community that can be created in asynchronous classes that I think if more people were maybe aware of that it might lead to more intrigue or interest.

Facilitator (15:03):

I imagine what you just said, sorry, [Richard], what you just said is probably counterintuitive to most folks from the outside looking in, that opportunity to community build to connect, et cetera in that asynchronous environment. It'd be interesting to come back to that. [Richard].

Richard (15:20):

Sorry. Thank you. I was just going to piggyback on something that [Suzanne] had said earlier that we experienced here as well, which was a backlash against online teaching institutionally. So during COVID, obviously everyone went... the year after, we're in a very conservative state and our governor had made sure that we couldn't require masks. So what we were able to do, though, at that time was to determine that any teacher for any class could teach online for their own health, and it didn't have to be listed that way. This is my interpretation, I could be wrong, but I think it was because some students got together and sued the university and said, "We don't need to pay the same tuition as online classes." But whatever the reasons, politically or financially or so forth to list what classes are specifically online in what form, like hybrid, synchronous, asynchronous, which I don't think is necessarily a bad thing.

(16:23):

Quick anecdote, I have two sons who have different educational struggles. One needs to be only in online settings, one cannot be in online settings because of their different mental, emotional, physical abilities, disabilities and so forth. So letting students know that, I think, is a great thing. But what we've had to do, and this was the point I wanted to get to, we've had to take every single course that we want to teach online, and we've had to run it through our very onerous system. So composition was already scheduled to be online because we had done all this ahead of time, but all of our other courses we've had to run at least including the old syllabi. So let's just say it was, we have a class called Rhetoric, that's a history of rhetoric.

(17:10):

We have to take the old syllabus, take an synchronous and asynchronous and run three different syllabi through this year-long process of evaluation. So three of us in the department probably did 25 to 30 courses last year and just to try to get more options and opportunities so that if an instructor wanted to teach a rhetoric class or a poetry class or an American Literature class or whatever, the university was not just allowing us to take those existing courses and make online versions of them. We had to run it straight through all this, I don't know what the apparatus is called, but for course approvals and everything. So that's really slowed down. I've seen, to [Suzanne's] point, this huge backlash. Even though we did such a nice job with it up to a certain point, now it seems like we're regressing a little bit, and the university is making it more difficult to teach those classes.

Suzanne (18:06):

I just wanted to add, so basically, what the system is trying to do is just making sure that you're... I'm trying to... really meaningfully put it online, not like you said, just take that offline or that face-to-face class. So in some ways, there's some value in that. But yeah, the work itself to do that is exactly what I think is that resistance. As a side note, [my institution] was actually sued as well for going online and not lowering tuition. People were really upset about that. So I think that was just settled just recently, so yeah.

Facilitator (18:59):

To circle back, [Kendra], to where this started with the idea of the standardized or the template course or whatever we want to call it, is there any evidence to show efficacy? I often get the sense that, again, folks on the outside looking in think there's too much variability in terms of student experience across courses in situations where faculty have relative autonomy to just build it and do it however, may be problematic in and of itself. But so the imposition of the standard then is supposed



to solve that problem. I actually think it is more of the band-aid, it's not getting at the problem. But what's been the experience of student satisfaction, student success, faculty satisfaction in using that material?

Kendra (19:49):

So I would say that there are differing levels of satisfaction across the different sets of stakeholders. For one piece of it, we have students who are satisfied with the experience because they are able to take their classes. So we have three campuses. We are geographically divided. So [this one campus] is our primary campus. It has 40 something thousand students. [Another campus] has about 5,000 students. [And, another campus] has about 1,000 students. Many of our online classes were originally developed [there]. Then they were no longer allowed to take those classes as online classes. Those classes were distributed to [the main campus and the larger regional campus with 5,000 students] as face-to-face classes. So having the shells allowed the students then to be able to have online classes and to be able to take them. So just that kind of satisfaction has been there. This is primarily speaking to our undergraduate degree program in professional and technical communication.

(21:08):

The faculty satisfaction with the course materials has been varied, and I would say less than stellar because the faculty, we have tenure line faculty who were left out of the process of developing those courses and who have a long history of expertise in teaching those courses, and in some cases, had industrial expertise as well out in the industry doing some of this work. So when they were left out of that design process, they were left out of the design process in two ways. One is the material and the other is the template building itself. So I do want to say something that [Richard] said stirred my memory on this. I had been working with our online development process much prior to our consolidation and so had been participating in things like quality matters conferences and things like that. So we had a fairly robust system that had been captured in what was previous to our now called [digital learning program name].

(22:33):

So when we were developing classes previously, it was faculty content expertise plus faculty expertise in online environments. Now we've pushed out online environment expertise to a different set of folks who understand in some ways how technology works, but not how the overlap of technology and content knowledge develop. Talking about nerding out to a piece of software that existed a long time ago, I'm going to bring up the dead list packet for online peer review. So when the folks who created dead lists, and that was Hugh Burns and Joyce Carter, and I'm not going to remember some of the... two other folks built that, they looked specifically at how the technology and the content develop each other. So you had writing teachers developing software for writing teachers for writing instruction, so the whole package. When you start to separate out the technology and the content, that's when we start to run into some of the problems. So I think that that's one of the things that I think personally I continue to struggle with is that idea of this mandated separation when we know that that's not best practice.

Richard (24:22):

I'm really curious about that shell idea, [Kendra], because, and I wonder if it could work. One of the challenges that I think that we face is just how time-consuming it is to build a course the first time. So I'm wondering if there could be something, we have a Canvas system for our course learning management and so forth, could I build a shell for some of these courses that people could borrow from as they might want to that might have some assignments, videos, interactions and so forth so they wouldn't have to build it from scratch because that first time. Even to [Suzanne's] point, one of

the challenges that I face, which I enjoy, is that sometimes in these online spaces, I feel like I'm doing a one-on-one tutorial with every single student.

(25:12):

I probably spend twice the time teaching online than I might in a face-to-face class. Maybe that's a good thing because students are engaged, and I'm writing more and trying videos and trying... I've never been real successful with Anson's Audio feedback, but I try some of the different tools and technologies that we have built into Canvas or other things. But a challenge is just how much time the first, especially the first time, and so I'm wondering, [Kendra], if maybe something like a shell is a way to help first-time teachers not have to do all that work of initially building everything from scratch.

Kendra (25:54):

I think that the way I think about it is yes, build a sandbox and put all of your materials into that sandbox and have other folks contribute to that sandbox. Then yes, lay out modules. You could do weekly modules, you could do project sets of modules and have all of the materials that would be available. Absolutely for your practica, walking students through, "This is how I would build out this course," or, "Here is my sandbox copy of this course," and have that material.

(26:30):

I think my pinch point is that someone else has designed the entire thing, and it has been gifted to me in my Canvas so that essentially, I become just a grader of material that I had no input. It's like, "I don't know where this assignment came from. This rubric doesn't match this assignment to my mind. How does this even work together?" So for me, having an opportunity to work closely with a group of people to say, "What should this course look like? What are the assignments that we might throw in there? What are the resources that we might throw in there? Oh, I found this great new video. Let's plug that one instead of this one of me talking," that would be fabulous in my mind.

Suzanne (27:23):

Yeah. To talk about that a little bit, I think the fear is having the whole class designed. Here at [my institution], we get a lot of shells. There's a lot of stuff like on Canvas Commons that we can use. I think it's mostly set up there by our faculty development professionals. So I think something that would, as we're talking about it, thinking about it would maybe help as a more department or program-oriented way that it could be team built, not the whole thing, giving those resources, having those basics and you could go in and fill it in.

(28:17):

But I think that might be a little bit of the apprehension is that they don't want something just given to them that they have no control over, and not even realizing... Because even after two years or however many we've spent of mostly teaching online or primarily teaching online, we still don't know all the tricks. We still didn't learn, I think, a really meaningful way to teach online. So there's still so much apprehension, even though people got pretty... they did it a lot, there's still so much apprehension. Maybe just the way we were thrown into it too is adding to that fear.

Richard (29:10):

So we have an [online learning unit name], [online learning unit abbreviation], it's called at our place. Because we're large and they very much think large-scale classes and that's not what we are. So their concerns are around lecture and video and cheating and attendance and engagement when you have 500 people or 300 people or 100 people. So one of the great things that we were able to do is we have two [online learning unit name and abbreviation] liaisons between that office and our first-year composition program.

(29:41):

So they take some of the best of what our distance learning folks do and try to help translate it into what we want is interactive classes, workshops. We're not concerned about cheating on tests. We're concerned about, how do you facilitate discussions in a small group setting? How do you, having shared software so we can give comments on each other's papers and those kinds of things? So getting two people dedicated for 10 hours a week to helping us take that large-scale model that [online learning unit abbreviation] brings and help us look at it for small classes has been a real benefit or treat for us over the last... I think we had that prior to COVID, so we probably have had that position for four or five years.

Facilitator (30:30):

So I'm just keeping an eye on our time here. Again, great discussion, but I want to be respectful of folks' time. The question that comes next on my script is actually one that I think most people have talked about to some degree. So again, if there's a different direction that you'd prefer to go as we conclude, that's totally fine, but I'll throw it out there. If anyone wants to talk about how your online writing instruction, either experience or direct instruction practice over the last few years has significantly changed, whether it's pandemic related or not, or if it hasn't really changed, if things are status quo or maybe regressing as some have suggested.

Suzanne (31:23):

I think just being conscious of students' time and their environment and everything, and that's no different than a face-to-face class, but I think even online because you don't see them, or at least asynchronously, which is how I normally would teach online, you just don't see them. Even as much community as we do, there's still several students that they're just a name on the screen. We're that language of, "We're in this together and please..." really, I think, and this adds more work to it, but really trying to say, "I'm a resource. I can't make judgements with a screen between us. I can't make those kinds of connections between what you're thinking and what you're doing and what I'm seeing and what I'm doing."

(32:40):

So I think I've just been very more careful to try to bring in their own experience as well. I think it's even more important online. Like I said, we don't want to just be disembodied names. So I think that has come in more trying to just imagine that yes, they know the technology, but they're definitely not going to use it. These are old-fashioned things, but I think they're still very current. They're still things that we have to consider. So I think that's very much in the forefront as I develop classes, as I teach them, et cetera.

Kendra (33:27):

I'm just going to add to that the idea, I think, that we are starting to see, again, some of the research on how effective online classes are and can be. I'm really excited by this general sense of things. We're starting to see more international collaborations across GSOLE and across ABLE and really starting to look at how now that we're post-pandemic more or less, how we are able to really look back at the classroom, whether that's a face-to-face classroom, whether that is a digitally-enhanced classroom, whether that is a fully online asynchronous or synchronous classroom, and really look at that research and do that research. So I'm hopeful that we're going to continue to see more of the research coming out of that to show what is effective and how we can demonstrate ultimately that it is effective. Because at least here in [my Southeastern state], we have to have that research to be able to try to have the kinds of things we'd like to have in a classroom to be successful.

Facilitator (34:47):

I feel like some of the pressure that I feel, and maybe all of us within the OWI community feel is that it does feel like we're at a bit of a, I hate to use the term, but an inflection point. We could go one of two ways, and there seems to be this insistent pull from some quarters within higher ed to get us back to that magical place that we used to be, which of course, wasn't versus that sense of could we really reflect on where we've been and now move to a different future, rather than just trying to rebuild the thing that fell apart in 2019, 2020.

Richard (35:34):

In terms of where I am now, I think the most exciting thing is that online teaching has fundamentally changed my teaching both in face-to-face and online spaces. So I've had a chance to write with...two grad students who developed that whole system for training and education. But just like I totally think about my face-to-face classroom space differently in terms of what I want that space to do and to have, I love online workshops, and I'll never do workshops the same way again in both online and face-to-face settings. I do more with breakout groups and lots of stuff with Google Docs or other shared documents where I set up tasks and people work on them and share screens afterwards. So these are things that I did at the early part of... and I know that literature there's... when I first moved into the online, well, that's hard to say exactly what, online has shifted over time. But in this modern iteration of Zoom online work, it was, in some ways, trying to replicate what we see in the traditional classroom.

(36:49):

Parts of that, I think, are good. I like to have a moment, and for example, every time I teach an online class, I'll do a Sunday overview of the week. I'll post that by midnight so that Monday morning students get this 10-minute overview of where we're going and why we are where we are and those kinds of things, which I might've done something like that in a face-to-face class. But basically, I think I figured out things that I like about online teaching better than face-to-face and things that I like about my face-to-face teaching that I try to put now in online classes. I find both my online and face-to-face classes are radically different than they were three to four years ago because of what I like and don't like, this idea of... well, I won't go into the things that I don't do. But just real briefly, I don't do discussion boards much anymore. I don't do online discussion.

(37:42):

I do different kinds of things, and it might be because I'm burned out on them or students are burned out on them, but I have found other ways to really... I want them engaged and working and talking and creating something together. I want there to be an artifact of that work at the end of the class period, whether that be a physical time period, like a synchronous class period or an asynchronous by the end of a unit they have a document or some set of documents or some website that they can go back to and they can see a representation of their work plus maybe some examples of that. So they're building things a lot more, and maybe I'm creating a space for them to build, use this sandbox metaphor that [Kendra], that people talk about with things like... so it's not exactly a sandbox in that particular way, but they're populating it.

(38:33):

So maybe more like student-sourced resources that they can go back to, doing all my assignment descriptions on video now so that at any time when I give that in a face-to-face class, it's three weeks, four weeks, five weeks from when it's due and most students aren't tuning in. What they want to do is they want to hear that stuff when they're actually working on it, which might be two, three weeks forward. If I have that in a video, then they can go back and see that when they need it, not when I want to deliver it at the beginning of an assignment. So there's tons and tons of little things that I do differently because of my online instruction that I don't think I have research evidence to show that that's effective, but my own felt sense. It's better teaching and better practice, and students seem to be responding very well to it.

Facilitator (39:25):

I think students respond really positively even if they're not aware of it, although, some are going in that the idea of digital asynchronous collaborative work is a really important life skill now, professional, academic, et cetera. I think that rings true to a lot of people, even if they don't necessarily realize it until you point it out. Well, again, a super productive and very enjoyable discussion. We're almost at an hour, so I'm going to cut us off. Thank you once again. Are there any final thoughts that people would like to share? All good? All right, so I'm just going to stop our recording here.

## Focus Group 7: Vera, Hal, & Liz

Facilitator (00:02):

Okay, so you should get the little popup asking you that the recording's okay. And I'll throw out my first guiding question here. This will be for anybody who wants to take it.

(00:16):

Very broad anybody interested in speaking to challenges and or successes related to your OWI work, current, past, looking to the future?

Vera (00:42):

I can start with the last, what is it now? Four, four and a half years of my work and as the WPA in charge of an online writing program. I think when I started back at my first institution where the support for online instructors existed only in the form of a stripped down English 102 PDC, and that was it. So everybody who was assigned to teach, I mean, that seems to be the case still at a lot of institutions, right? Instructors are assigned to teach an online course and given kind of a minimal support if there's no pre-designed course or a template course or even a bare bone template that can be developed.

(01:38):

But back in the 2019, when I first started there, I did a round of observations of online courses and it did not look so great when instructors are left to their own devices without support. So it was kind of a preview of how a lot of people would be struggling then during the pandemic transition to online.

(02:06):

But yeah, no, just kind of being able to observe what happens and then talking to people about, "Hey, what if we gave you some support in the form of this pre-designed course?" And I've been a big advocate for both having the PDC, but also allowing instructor freedom and how they work with them, how they adapt them and modify them.

(02:27):

So I feel like I've gotten quite a few people on board with shared curriculum since then, and also a lot of administrators to see, "Oh no, we got to do better than just telling people, 'Now you have to teach online.'" So that's kind of what comes to mind first.

Hal (02:46):

Yeah, we have the opposite problem. We have a ton of support, and because of that, they're like, "So you can have bigger classes 'cause you've got these tools and you've got course designers and you've got these innovative shells that we've already built and you've got a lot of things surrounding you that are going to allow you to do this at 35 students." We're like, "Okay, well maybe, but it's going to be a bigger challenge than you think it is, just because tools don't always minimize the workload. They just shifted it around."

(03:22):

So we actually have, I wish we had less support, honestly, because then they wouldn't ask as much of us. So there's an ever-increasing drumbeat of getting these writing courses up higher caps because we've given you all these tools. The latest one is a AI grading tool called Packback that they're trying to pilot.

(03:46):

And so we have no lack of support actually at our institution. And the challenge is making the argument that with all this tool, we still can't really do a good job at higher than 30 and 25 is great

and 20 is ideal. Here are the recommendations from our committee of record, our organization of record.

(04:11):

So we have sort of the opposite problem there, and that has been one of the reasons that... one of the changes over the past couple of years is that they've finally hit the ramp and they're trying to get us to do more with more, and we are not sure how it's going to go.

Liz (04:39):

My experience is nothing like that because we don't have an online writing program. We have a writing program and we offer courses in online hybrid and face-to-face. And I think that there has always been ample support, I guess, of how to use the technology, but not really of how to teach well in the technology.

(05:14):

But within our department, there are pretty robust conversations and a lot of curriculum sharing and the like. I feel like I'm teaching better online than I ever had because the pandemic really allowed me to understand what I was doing. The first thing I noticed was, I was like, "Oh, I've been teaching online all these years and I've been kind of ignoring them because it's easy to set them on autopilot and deal with all the people who are right in your face all the time." And the need to be... I'd be prepared for the week in my online classes, but you're kind of preparing for the next day in face-to-face.

(05:56):

So I think I got a lot better at not thinking of these classes as just creating a shell to put students in to do the work, but really thinking about them more the way I think about face-to-face classes. So what can I leverage in these spaces? I also really thought, especially with the pandemic, of the need to make them more social spaces and how to integrate authentic interactions more effectively. And I feel like I've gotten very good at that.

(06:33):

And so I'm thankful for the pandemic in that sense that it opened my eyes to areas where I was being weak, and it allowed me to be far more supportive. And as we transition, because I'm sure many colleges are doing this, transitioning more face-to-face, still trying to preserve what I can of my online schedule, and I'm trying to keep those things in mind. But it does get harder when you're pulled in multiple directions because of multiple modalities. 'Cause they are taking classes in multiple-

Hal (07:14):

Yeah, we have the same problem, students taking classes in multiple modalities, teachers teaching in multiple modalities. And again, I feel like we've actually gotten good support for this. We have resources that give us expectations, guidelines, we have a question, there's an answer. We have course designers who are there to go through and make sure that your course is set up. If there's something busted, they'll tell you. You don't get it every semester but I've had it happen before where they were like, "Did you know this is broken?" I was like, "No, that's great. Thank you. I love that."

(07:53):

So they're very committed to the online education process, but it is a challenge, just like you said, to make sure that I'm doing at minimum an intro to the week announcements so they feel like I'm a real person and a recap of the week at the end, so they feel like I'm a real person, respond to their comments and concerns in the same amount of time and effort that I'm responding to my in-person students.

(08:18):

And that is something that is the perpetual challenge 'cause we also do them in seven and a half week chunks. So we don't do them full 15-week classes. We do them at half speed. And so it's a bit of a blitz every time we tell... All of our new faculty realize immediately that they can teach two B sessions in fall and two spring sessions in A and then be done teaching in March until January. We're like, "Yes, but also you will be dead. There's no way you can possibly do that. It's not at the speed that we do our writing courses. You could not possibly do that." So there are built-in limitations to the writing course that we have, but you still got to try to jump over some of those limitations to get to good writing instruction in my opinion.

Facilitator (09:21):

[Vera], can I go back to you and ask a little bit more about what was involved in those online observations that you did? Assuming that you did them sort of at scale, were there kind of trends or obvious gaps that you were noticing that you were able to then address with targeted professional development and support?

Vera (09:43):

Yeah. So okay, four years ago, what can I still remember from then? We developed kind of an online observation protocol based on what the program typically looked at in terms of our face-to-face courses, what kind of the important areas there. Also looking at elements like course design, applying a few different perspectives. I mean, it was not anywhere near as intense as something like Quality Matters review for course design, but just the basic good practices of online writing instruction. Do they have a start here module? Are there enough directions? Do students know what to do? Is it organized clearly? Are there links that are working? Is there a variety of materials, not just posting instructor notes as a PDF and hoping students will figure out what to do with them.

(10:44):

So yeah, in terms of course design, it was kind of all over the place. We had some instructors who had some experience with online teaching or some idea of how things work or they had experience taking an online class, and it was kind of obvious in the way they kept things more or less organized, tried to supplement video lectures and assignment prompts and all of the discussion assignments.

(11:12):

And there were a few instructors who clearly had no training and no experience from any side. And then it was just posting my lecture notes from my in-person class online and just leaving students to figure out what to do with all that. So we saw some of that, and then I had to meet, usually I would meet with the instructor after the observation, kind of talk through, "Okay, what are the things that work well? What are things that don't work well? How can we support?"

(11:47):

But then at the time, I was already building the pre-design courses, so I was able to say, "Hey, these are some of the things that are going to be addressed when we finish building this course. And if you're teaching online again, we'll ask you to use it, at least as a starting point. From there, you can change things." And we also built in a few different options for instructors to choose from. They don't have to teach this assignment. They can choose something else.

(12:16):

So yeah, we try to aim for supporting not as much as being the prescriptive voice or the online teaching police, 'cause that's also not great. I don't know if that answers your question more or less.

Facilitator (12:33):

It does. And it sort of feeds into my other question that's back to [Liz] about that attention to making the online space or the online learning space, a social space and feeling human and interactive and



authentically interactive. Can you maybe talk a little bit more about what you've done or what you currently do to facilitate that in your teaching?

Liz (12:59):

Yes, and I think it's hard to separate, 'cause there's strategies that are just strategies, and those are sometimes hard to separate from the curriculum because just throwing a strategy out may or may not do the job. So I was teaching a second quarter of a two quarter series of first year writing, and so that quarter focuses on argument, and I had always done work with rhetorical listening before we get into things. So I was like, "How do I now get this going in this space?"

(13:35):

And so we spent some time at the beginning of the quarter having them view a few TED Talks that have very differing perspectives and people from very different backgrounds than probably what they're accustomed to and having them practice listening and then discussing what they saw. So I used, I guess a lot of discussion boards, but kind of setting up that tone of really listening and trying to understand versus just react, made the rest of the discussions in the quarter pretty rich actually.

(14:15):

It became less just like, "I'm doing my two posts to fulfill this assignment." And I'm not saying that doesn't happen. I also set up discussions, so I know this isn't necessarily a best practice, but I kind of, going into the pandemic, knew that a lot of these students were not online students, so I did a lot more of getting them into, we use Canvas daily, or not daily, but multiple times a week. And so their discussions, they had to post and then they had to reply on this day, and then they had to reply to what someone said to them. So trying to get them to be a little bit more interactive using discussions. We did full class discussions, but using the small group more often so that they had kind of a cohort of people and responding to them.

(15:05):

And then what really helped the discussion is in their essay that they wrote, their first essay was an exploratory essay. They had to quote from their peers, and so they paid a lot more attention to the discussions and it gave their peers a lot more weight when they had to really actually pay attention to their ideas. And so those things really helped. It's still not super interactive, but they could call each other by name, they could remember what certain peers said, and they would recall this later when they're writing about it. And so it's like they don't know them face to face. But that did humanize the experience, and I could see it all quarter long just setting it up that way. I could see them, that they kind of knew some people in their class.

(15:56):

I think peer review, and I don't do anything particularly interesting or exceptional in peer review, but peer review has been very helpful too. So setting it up is not just a checklist of what they need to go through, but approaching it as just your colleagues and readers. And so trying to get them to learn to respond to one another in ways that are just more supportive of the writer. I think peer review has gone really well, and like I said, I can't say I'm doing anything particularly interesting in peer review, but it's just like whatever tone that was just seeped into everything. And so the interactive things that we had just felt more personal and they felt more responsible to their peers. It was less about getting their assignment done, though there is absolutely that aspect to it, but I mean, they seemed to understand that they were not just in here alone completing modules and checking things off the list. They seemed to understand that there were things that had to be done collaboratively.

(17:04):

I also tend to do collaborative projects in online classes, but I try to set them up in ways that allow people to work as online students need to work. So not synchronously necessarily, but how can they just collaboratively work on a document or a presentation. And I think those things also help it feel

more like a educational environment and not just a, "I'm plowing through this on my own and don't really care about the others." And so I've been pleased with those things. And like I said, I'm not doing anything particularly innovative. I think it's just setting it up in that sort of tone and making it regular enough that they understand that engagement is actually part of what they have to do.

Facilitator (17:52):

I actually love that idea of trying to integrate what I think some students experience is these pockets of writing or pockets of work that they have to do. Like there's discussion boards over here, there's the essay I have to write over here. There's the reading response over here. But they're all these discrete things that don't speak to one another. And I feel like efforts to integrate, like to quote from the discussion board, it seems so doable, but it's like one of those high impact practices that really does help students see the bigger picture.

Hal (18:30):

Yeah, that's really interesting. And it's something I have had a struggle with is getting students to collaborate effectively. When I got here to my institution, we relied heavily on the discussion boards and assignments model, and it was sort of tedious. Students sort of joked about it and it just didn't seem like it was going super well. You know by the time that they're making sarcastic posts in their own posts that they're not really into discussion boards at this time.

(19:11):

So I actually, instead of going integrated, I went the opposite direction and I sort of tried to pull them away from the traditional idea of discussion board. And I took this idea from a colleague at a conference who did it in an in-person class, but this person, their students have to go and talk to someone about what they had done in that week's class. And I thought, "Oh, well, I can have my online students talk to someone in real life. They all have a in-person life somewhere." And so I modified it so that they have to just communicate somewhere. They can either do an online post, like a YouTube comment or a blog post, or a Facebook post, or they can just go and talk to someone in person.

(20:00):

And since I'm teaching technical communication, I'm teaching professionalization courses that have strong writing components. I also have a big audience, 'cause they're online students, of working professionals who are getting a degree, whether at the undergraduate or graduate level. And so they often go and talk to their boss about what they're learning, which is way better than I thought. I thought they would talk to their roommate or the friend, but people were actually using this to go and interact with people in their real life, in their in-person life.

(20:37):

And this was surprising to me and happily surprising, and it seemed to help students engage with the course better because they were thinking about it outside of the box of the screen. They had to actually go somewhere and do something. And so that worked for me. I have had courses where I had to do that and discussion boards, 'cause they were just unavoidable discussion boards. But I really liked doing that when I can to help students integrate it more into their class life. They have to do stuff out in the world in their in-person classes.

(21:11):

And so that's what I've tried to do to get out of the discussion board malaise. But I think about discussion boards more than I think just about anything else in online teaching. How can we make these not terrible because they seem to some degree essential, but they seem also to some degree very easily to do poorly.

(21:39):

Thoughts? What do you do for discussion boards?

Facilitator (21:47):

[crosstalk 00:21:45] Go ahead.

Vera (21:48):

Sorry. I actually wanted to clarify, so students would find somebody in real life to talk to about what they were doing in class rather than just like reporting that. Is there any sort of check-in with, do they describe it?

Hal (22:05):

Yeah, so the concession to the discussion board is that they then have to write 50 to 100 words about what they did. And so then they report back, "I had a discussion with my boss about this. He was already thinking about it because of a different thing. And so we had this really interesting conversation." Sometimes you get, "I talked to my roommate and he thought it was interesting." I'm like, "Great, you probably did that. It's so bad of a response that you probably did that."

(22:34):

But then sometimes they'll, like, I had one person send a DM to an influencer and get a DM back, and I was like, "Not what I thought was going to happen, but communication, it works." So I've had all sorts of weird things happen, but they have to report back afterwards.

(22:53):

And then, this is a twist that I added afterwards, for a student response to that discussion board, they have to go and find a link on the internet that relates somehow to the conversation that the person was having, and then they have to deliver something meaningful. I'm always impressed when people, two or three people deliver the same exact link. "You did not read the comments, and I can guarantee you that that's the first Google hit, but fine, you did the work." So I've tried to structure it, but I'm always looking for something to do better, to try to get that social interaction because this is the social interaction, right? How do we do this better?

Vera (23:34):

Yeah, I think they seem tedious because if you think about an in-person class and having a whole class discussion, it does not happen in the same way. We do not ask a question and then go one by one, "You respond. You respond." That doesn't happen.

Hal (23:49):

It's true.

Vera (23:51):

So when I worked with a better LMS, not D2L, I was able to organize it easier where I had students sign up to be a discussion moderator for extra credit where they would just summarize or respond. I think the assignment was you have to respond to three or four people without posting yourself, but then you also have to submit a summary. And I post that summary in the course announcement, and I also had that in my syllabus policies that sometimes we just don't feel like we have anything to say on a topic. We just want to sit back and listen. So students would get a pass for three or four discussions this semester. You can just sit back and listen and then just comment on what other people are saying, but you don't have to be the original poster. So I try to make it more, I don't know, a live interaction that way.

Hal (24:48):

That is super interesting and super helpful. I've not thought about how that relates back to in-person discussions that way.

Vera (24:58):

I mean, sometimes it's not helpful to think about, "oh, how can we replicate a face-to-face component?" Sometimes it's not helpful at all because online is different. But then if you think about some of these, we're trying to have that social aspect through discussions through, I don't know, small groups or online meetings, but then something feels off and students see it as a chore or like, "Oh, this is just another discussion," where they just need to post something and then don't care what other people are saying. So I don't know.

Liz (25:34):

I've kind of done that less, I think, in my writing classes than in lit classes. But I think it would work in writing classes where they're reading the same thing, but I'll put them in small groups and they take turns being discussion leader. So they have to have a discussion every few days or every week depending on how fast they're reading through things. But they kind of set up the schedule and they determine who's responsible. And then if they can't do it, they can work with one another to have someone substitute for them. And that's worked pretty well. I mean, there's always the occasional student, but for the most part, they seem responsible to one another when they're, you know what I mean? They know this group now knows them, and so it gives them more responsibility than if I just told them that they're going to do it. It's easier for them to back out from me than it is for them to back out from their peers.

Hal (26:30):

Yeah. When you've got to find somebody to cover for you at work instead of your boss trying to find someone to cover for you at work.

Liz (26:39):

I've had colleagues who have used discussion forums well. I haven't been doing this, but I've looked at theirs as kind of a different way to do peer review. And so they'll put students in groups and you don't post your whole paper. They post a piece that they have concerns about, and they use the discussion board as a way for their small group to give them feedback on this. So I don't know how to feel about my introduction, or maybe they'll even post the whole thing, but they're supposed to focus in the conversation on something and then their peers discuss that. So it's a little bit more student self-directed that way. So I like it. I haven't done it yet, but I've watched folks do it successfully. So I need to figure out how to integrate that.

Facilitator (27:25):

I'm a big proponent, actually something that you mentioned, [Liz], of online, fully asynchronous classes, but still doing group work. And it never ceases to amaze me how novel this is for so many students who've taken multiple online classes but never actually worked with a classmate. And it takes some more scaffolding early to connect people and agree on how we're going to communicate and to be accountable to one another. But I've had pretty good success, I think, in converting skeptical students that this is a thing that can happen by actually selling it as a 21st century skill. Digital collaboration is a thing that you're probably going to have to do unless if you want in professional capacities and probably personal capacities and further academic capacities, it seems to resonate like, "Oh, this is a transferrable skill outside of this one little situation that I'm in."

Hal (28:30):

Yeah, if you're going to have a-

Liz (28:32):

[crosstalk 00:28:31] go ahead.

Hal (28:33):

Oh, no, go for it.

Liz (28:34):

I was going to say, we have to think about it too, where, because many people want to approach it like a really traditional group project, and that's not going to work. You have to use the tools that you have and be a lot more flexible in how you think about what contributions look like and how you might assess them and who should determine how they're assessed. And then I've always been super flexible with just like I have a deadline, and they can choose whether they want a project manager or whether they want to just all be responsible as a group, but often I have the project manager freaked out 'cause it's always the control freak who chose to be the project manager.

(29:15):

So, I mean, just kind of giving them... it's like, "You're not all going to fail because folks aren't working in the same time pattern that you want to work." It's like you have to learn how to do this 'cause they're not going to work on the same schedule as you, and just because you imposed it doesn't mean they're going to do it, but I'm not going to fail you all. I'm trying to get you to work through this problem. So that usually reduces a lot of resentment and frustration. It's just knowing that they can all still be successful, even if they're... I was like, "Welcome to my world. We do not work at the same pace."

Hal (29:47):

That's the truth. I had grad students in a writing class, and it was a social media class, and we actually did a civic project with a local city that wanted a policies and procedures document for their social media manager. We did it through a contact at my university. So she came to me and said, "Hey, can you do this? We have this thing all set up for you. You just need to do it." And we said, "Great, love that." So we worked it out and I had to have them work, they were online grad students, and I had to have them figure out how to collaborate together.

(30:23):

And it worked okay. Google Docs is amazing, but it was a lot of overhead and a lot of scaffolding. And my students, I had to do just-in-time learning so that as they got to the next section of the paper, they would email me and be like, "We don't know how to do this." I'm like, "Of course not. I haven't taught you that yet. That's on Monday. You could read ahead though." And they hated that. And so it was, in seven and a half weeks, we still got it done, and the city actually used the deliverable, and in the end it turned out great. But man, the students, it felt like a real live problem for them as opposed to a writing instruction task.

(31:03):

And I kind of liked that, but I kind of hated it at the same time. They felt stressed, like good stress, but also some bad stress. And so I haven't done that again, especially not the civic project, but I have not done a big group collaborative project like that in now five years because it was a lot for grad students. And I was like, there's no way undergraduate students could survive that. So I would need

better teaching tactics to try to do more collaborative work like that, because I don't think I'm prepared to prepare students for that.

Facilitator (31:41):

Was the whole class a group?

Hal (31:45):

No, we broke it up. We broke up the document into parts.

Facilitator (31:48):

Okay.

Hal (31:48):

And so there were four groups. It was like, I don't know, 14 or 15 students, somewhere between 12 and 15 students. And so we broke it up into four little groups and each had a part. And then there was the natural sort of, I had to put transition sentences and make sure that there was some semblance of connection between the parts. But that was harder too, because when I do civic projects or group projects like that, which I do in my in-person courses, the students are talking to each other in desks next to each other, and they're like, "Are you guys doing that?" And they're like, "No, of course not. Of course we're not doing that. No, definitely not." And we don't get a lot of that sidebar socialization in the online course that I run. I need to do better at that if I'm going to have these sorts of projects, because that sort of integration and socialization is just key for those group projects, and I felt like it didn't quite get there with that project.

Facilitator (33:05):

So I'm just looking at our time. We probably have just a few minutes left. I don't like to cut us short, but I also want to be respectful of people's time. My last, or one of my prompt questions here, I think we've already really talked through how has your online writing instruction changed over the last few years? I think we've all talked on that to some degree.

(33:27):

Maybe as a good conclusion, I'd be interested A., if there are things on anyone's mind about your own instruction, about the field generally that you'd like to see happening, that you think are successes that are happening, but also maybe to continue with that forward-looking. How do you see yourself and/or the field changing, evolving over the next few years or maybe many years? Anyone want to take a stab at that one?

Hal (33:57):

Well, like I said, the reason that I thought I could have something to say is because being at an institution that has been doing online education for almost 15 years aggressively and intentionally, we are always doing weird stuff that we think will maybe make things better or maybe make things worse. We don't know. And so I think that the process of doing online writing instruction is becoming more understandable to students. They're not seeing it as this funky weird thing. Even before the pandemic, our students were sort of starting to come around on it. But I think that there's a level of normalization that has happened through the pandemic and through the last five years of transitions, but also there's a level of fatigue that has come along with it. Our students are just sort of sick of online courses because of this particular round of courses.

(35:01):

So some of those students are about to graduate and then will be out of the students that had a strange and unusual experience of college due to COVID. But I don't know what the next round of students who went through high school with the pandemic writing instruction and instruction in general, but writing instruction in particular, are going to come to us with. Are they going to be fatigued like our students are? Are they going to be just, "This is how instruction is." Are they going to have a higher bar for us to be successful? Because they're like, "Well, our previous teachers were doing this." And we're like, "Oh, well, we have competitors now."

(35:43):

So I feel like the big shift for us is going to be that next wave of students that come in who had online writing instruction as high schoolers, and now are asking what it means to do online writing instruction at college after having already experienced it.

Facilitator (36:11):

Any thoughts?

Vera (36:13):

Can I clarify the question? What are the things we're looking forward to or?

Facilitator (36:19):

Maybe less looking forward to per se, but just more trajectories that you feel maybe you individually are on or departmentally or even the field of online writing instruction writ large. Where is that headed?

(36:41):

I mean, the idea of student expectation changing is really fascinating. I think a lot of us in the online writing instruction community were really nervous that anytime someone described pandemic be in your pajamas learning as online, we were like, "No, no, no, no, no. Let's call it remote. Call it anything but online." So hopefully that term has not been poisoned for good, but it is interesting if students experience a certain really effective online instruction, whether it's in writing or not, do they get enough of that that they then come into the next class sort of expecting the video and expecting good course organization and expecting clear due dates and assignments. It'd be nice if they did, but I don't sense that we're there yet necessarily.

Vera (37:30):

Yeah, and... Oh, sorry.

Hal (37:32):

No, go for it.

Vera (37:35):

Yeah, in terms of the place of the writing courses, more specifically in the online curriculum, right, because our online campus keeps growing faster than our face-to-face, the main campus we call it, and main campus students also have come to expect the option of online courses if they want to take one, sure. But then writing courses, traditionally they provide that more of a small class experience and one-on-one interactions with the professor, with their peers. There's more of a communal feel to it. And I don't know, for students who are completing their entire degrees online, do online classes do anything for them in that sense?

(38:29):

I don't know. Hopefully they do, but my guess would be not quite the same. I mean, in terms of where it's heading, I just keep hearing it seems like there's such a wide range of experiences instructors have, students have a different institutions depending on how much, I mean, even our own focus group is a good example. Some institutions don't really provide anything, some provide a lot. Some provide this kind of a locked shared curriculum that this is the way we're doing things here.

(39:05):

And I think with, if the two institutions I've worked at any indication that that online courses have stayed in demand or online offerings keep growing after the pandemic, if that's any indication, then it seems like the writing programs need to step up and provide and figure out how to provide better support. Support that actually works for both instructors and students, because it's not ethical. It's not good practice to just let people on their own, sink or swim. And kind of the overbearing oversight that online courses unfortunately allow, well, fortunately in some cases.

(39:53):

So it feels like we're still figuring out the balance. What does good support look like? What on online writing program administration should be doing to make everybody's lives a little bit better, a little bit more effective, successful educational experience.

Liz (40:17):

I think when I look at the future, I think it's unsurprisingly multiplicitous so it's like when I think about my own institution and many like institutions, two year colleges, we're navigating, and it especially resonated with me when you talked about these pandemic era visions of what online learning is moving into the college level. We're actually studying that on my campus right now because demand is high for online English classes, but administrators want face-to-face. And so we've been asked to really scale this back. And so we're doing a study just to try to understand what students are choosing and why they're choosing what they're choosing. And then we'll do our post study here at the end of the term to understand how did this modality work? Did it enable enough interaction? Did it enable their learning? Did it enable them to accomplish what they wanted? But I feel like at a two-year college level, the students who are coming here are not necessarily coming for an online degree.

(41:37):

And so they're going to take a mishmash of classes that fit their difficult complex lives. And so some will be online and some will be face-to-face, and different subjects work better for them in those ways. And that's what I'm kind of seeing is they're kind of piecing together these schedules. And so in those cases, when we work with that sort of population that really is local, even if they're not synchronous and together, it's easier to develop community and to do some of these things online because they may not know one another, but they kind of know how this works and may even have a fairly traditional schedule that just has this class outside of it.

(42:21):

And then I look at institutions that are fully online or really pushing for offering these to people around the world at any time, and the trajectory looks different. I imagine that AI is going to play a piece, and I'm not trying to be fearful or doomsday about that, but I don't like that because I think it enables some things. But I'm really worried about the loss of the personal, the accessible, the responsive and the strategic that comes from humans, that comes from creating a course in advance that operates, but actually having humans respond to the situation at hand.

(43:06):

And I worry about class size, I worry about all those things that I'm not really going to have to worry about in my institution. But I think that is a future of writing instruction. It's like it shouldn't be an openly massive online course. It needs to be, if it's writing instruction, it needs to be communication



acts to one another, or we're kind of missing what writing is. And I'm old. I may have antiquated ideas about what writing is.

Hal (43:36):

No, I think there's a lot of people that agree. Also, one, AI is about to just get completely hammered by copyright. So we're going to have a completely different AI future in about two years. Two, do you have variable tuition for your on ground and your online courses? Fascinating. So our problem is we do, it's cheaper to do the online. And so I feel like maybe we could just make them equal and it would solve the problem. I don't know. But yeah, I'm very interested if they're still taking online courses, even if it costs the same, that is not our problem. That's a very different problem.

Vera (44:16):

It costs more, I think for our students.

Hal (44:19):

More? We're in the same state!

Vera (44:22):

There's a very small online course fee when they sign up for an online course, they pay extra \$50 or something like that for an online course.

Hal (44:33):

Oh my goodness. Why can't we do that? We would solve so many of our problems. We wouldn't have to have large course sizes. Can you please come talk to our provost?

Facilitator (44:48):

Our institution's interesting because we have an in-district, which is most of our students, but not all tuition rate, and then an out of district, which is a lot more expensive. But our online, ostensibly serving anybody with a computer, is the in-district rate, which is kind of interesting.

Hal (45:09):

Ours is below in-state tuition.

Vera (45:15):

Oh, wow.

Facilitator (45:15):

Wow.

Hal (45:16):

Yeah. That's why we're having these massive courses. Yeah. I mean, it solves one problem and creates another, so goes it all. But, yeah.

Facilitator (45:29):

So I don't want to drag this out too long, but I have to ask or at least observe, [Liz], the funny thing that you said about, "Well, students seem to want X, Y, Z, but this other group of people want this, so why on earth would we do what the students want? Let's do this other thing." Wait, what?

Liz (45:51):

We don't ask. I mean, we don't ask very often about anything. And so that's why a couple colleagues and I decided to do the study. It's like, "You know, probably we can make better decisions about our schedule if we asked."

Facilitator (46:06):

Asked, right. Revolutionary thinking.

Liz (46:08):

And maybe other departments need to do this too, because I think our English coursework actually went really well during the pandemic. Students were successful. We had lower enrollment in the college, but students were still about as successful in English as they ever had been because a lot of us knew how to do this. And actually English classes are more personal than anything they were getting.

(46:33):

And so I think English classes really were kind of a salvation to some students to have someplace where someone was listening to them and hearing their stories and cared what they were doing and could point them to support... Those went well.

(46:50):

But that was not true of math and science, and I don't blame those folks. They did not choose to teach online, and they were not trained to teach online. So they were all thrown online and everybody had a terrible experience. And so they were chomping at the bit to come back.

(47:05):

But students didn't have bad experiences in English. And I feel like part of our enrollment is showing that, that it suits a lot of people's learning style to be able to think and write and interact on times that work for them.

Facilitator (47:26):

Yeah.

Hal (47:28):

Okay. I have to run to my next meeting, but this was wonderful. Thank you.

Facilitator (47:32):

Thank you all for your time. I'm going to hit the stop recording.