Pandemic Pedagogy: What We Learned from the Sudden Transition to Online Teaching and How It Can Help Us Prepare to Teach Writing in an Uncertain Future

Jennifer Sheppard

This article reports on findings from a hyperlocal programmatic survey on writing instructors' experiences in moving teaching online during the coronavirus pandemic. It highlights key challenges instructors reported, including a need for strategies addressing increased workload; a desire for greater experience with pedagogy- rather than technology-driven instruction; a plea for attention to personal/professional well-being; and concerns about the increased attention needed to address logistics in digital teaching. The article contextualizes these local challenges within larger scholarly conversations about online writing instruction (OWI) and offers a series of pedagogical and professional best practices relevant for future online and hybrid teaching. It concludes with a discussion of the limitations of this project and directions for future research.[1]

From the widespread illness and death due to COVID-19 and the resulting stay-at-home orders to the extraordinary protests against racial injustice, 2020 was a time of historic tumult. It was also a time of massive change to the education system at all levels. While distance education generally and the work of scholars in online writing instruction (OWI) in particular have continued to expand over the last two decades, only a small minority of teachers and institutions were prepared for the abrupt transition to fully online instruction. As one *Chronicle of Higher Education* article described the experience, Pandemic spring 2020 was "pedagogical triage," not the careful, deliberative work normally required to design online teaching and learning (Bessette et al.).

Although there is much uncertainty about how ongoing pandemic concerns and the large-scale online teaching precedent now set will affect higher education in coming years, it is important to document this experience and the significant impact it has had on composition instructors and their pedagogies. This article begins by examining the spring 2020 perspectives of instructors in one large writing studies program. Reflecting on responses to an anonymous departmental survey about workload and pedagogical choices in the sudden shift to online teaching, I highlight key challenges instructors reported and

contextualize these local experiences within larger scholarly conversations about OWI.

While responses to this survey echo many issues raised previously by OWI scholars, on a local level, they also illustrate what the rapid shift looked like in practice for both individual instructors and a program as a whole that was largely new to offering online writing instruction. After offering a set of practical pedagogical suggestions for addressing some of these concerns in future online and hybrid teaching, I conclude with a brief discussion of limitations of the survey and some directions for future research.

What We Can Learn from the Suddenly Online Experience of Spring 2020

Like almost all of higher education, the writing studies department at my large urban public university made the abrupt, mid-semester switch to teaching all courses online in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following a week of what campus administrators called an "instructional pause," our department's 90 instructors and the roughly 7,000 students we were teaching transitioned into various synchronous and asynchronous forms of virtual teaching.[2] Prior to this change, our department offered only about 15% of our courses at a distance and about the same percentage of our faculty had completed training for online teaching.[3]

Near the end of the spring 2020 semester, we shared some of our challenges and successes in a virtual faculty meeting and began to think about the potential for being online again in the fall. To help us better understand everyone's online classroom experiences and the ways we might support one another moving forward, an ad hoc committee was tasked with designing a short, anonymous survey via Google Forms.[4] Our intentions were twofold: to understand if, where, and how workload had increased so we could find ways to ease that strain; and to identify professional development needs related to online writing instruction to better prepare for future virtual teaching. As shown in the appendix, we crafted a 10-question survey and received responses from 47 of our 90 instructors.

In addition to documenting a significant spike in the number of hours instructors spent preparing for and interacting with students, our committee also saw four professional and pedagogical themes emerge in the survey results: an appeal for strategies to address the increased workload; a desire for greater experience with pedagogy- rather than technology-driven instruction; a plea for attention to personal/professional well-being; and a need for attending to increased logistical concerns in digital teaching. In the sections that follow, I discuss these four online teaching challenges by drawing on existing scholarship in OWI. While a rich body of research and professional organization guid-

ance has emerged over the last two decades, many instructors and programs have remained largely unfamiliar with these contributions, even during the pandemic's widespread transition online.

Although our survey provides a snapshot of the experiences of faculty in one local context, these findings confirm the significance and applicability of prior work in OWI. Reports from a variety of popular press, social media, and professional venues suggest that many of the challenges our faculty faced were shared widely by instructors both in writing studies and across higher education. Documenting these experiences will contribute to a record of local studies examining the educational impact of the pandemic spring 2020 and the larger trend toward more online course and program offerings. Findings from our survey illustrate how OWI scholarship can inform theory and practice not just in our specific writing program, but across the broader composition field. Additionally, these findings highlight new directions for future research.

Four Professional and Pedagogical Themes That Emerged from Our Survey

Workload Considerations for Faculty and Students

In trying to understand how workload may have increased during the shift to online teaching, one question our survey asked was: "In your best estimation and in relation specifically to online teaching, how much additional time ABOVE your normal preparation did you spend planning, teaching, grading, or communicating in the SPRING semester with students per working day since our transition to online teaching?" Given a scale from 0-6+ hours, half of our 47 respondents reported they spent *at least an additional four hours per course per day* over their normal teaching preparation. With a course load of five classes per semester, each capped at 30 students for our full-time lecturers, this was a substantial workload addition.[5] Put simply, as one participant noted in response to a later question, "We must not underestimate the time this takes … This work has been worthwhile, and my teaching will be much better for it. But if we care about good pedagogy, we must realize that course development takes a MASSIVE amount of time."

In an open-ended question intended to unpack the quantitative question above, our survey asked respondents, "What are the top 2-3 things you are spending additional time on that you would not in teaching a face-to-face course?" Without time for advanced preparation, many instructors commented that they attempted to port in-person class activities, major projects, and due dates into the online setting without much adaptation. That is, they largely sought to fill in their regular meeting days with recorded lectures, live Zoom sessions, and required discussion board posts intended to track student "at-

tendance" and participation. One third of instructors left comments indicating that they felt overwhelmed and burned out from this approach as they tried to respond to every post, draft, email, and request for virtual appointments.

Although the sudden shift to online teaching did not include the pre-course planning that is often cited (Borgman and McCardle; Darby and Lang; Morris and Stommel; Pallof and Pratt; Warnock) as the most significant time investment for new online instructors, survey respondents identified a number of other activities that made their teaching experiences so time-intensive. Comments highlighted instructors' curricular efforts such as redesigning course schedules, creating asynchronous presentation materials, and conducting lectures via Zoom. Additionally, several noted the extra time required for setting up and doing virtual conferencing, communicating with whole classes and individual students, responding to discussion board posts, managing student groups/interactions, and generally trying to replicate activities previously accomplished in an in-person setting.

The mid-term, unexpected transition to online teaching was certainly a part of this heavy workload. Planning that might previously have been accomplished over several weeks or months was compressed into a few days. OWI and broader distance education literature highlight the front-loading work of designing syllabi, scheduling, and curricular materials prior to the start of a course. Without a doubt, teaching online adds extra time to pre-course planning and daily preparation. While teaching in fully online or hybrid environments shares many pedagogical similarities with in-person instruction, it also involves other affordances and constraints that require time for reimaging teaching and learning.

However, even with such advanced preparation, work during the term is hardly light. Just as in an in-person course, the day-to-day preparation, interaction with students, and feedback on their writing in an online course requires constant attention. By its nature as an online, always-accessible activity, OWI students and instructors often have unrealistic expectations about availability and response times, adding to a sense that the work is never done. As Borgman and McArdle discuss,

> At the start, an instructor new to online teaching may feel very overwhelmed and working harder may seem like the answer. Many new and seasoned online instructors will jump into online instruction with zealous enthusiasm … but this can be counterproductive and sets unrealistic expectations for students while creating an impossible standard for instructors to uphold in the long run. (Borgman and McArdle 54)

Survey respondents echoed these observations, commenting on the vastly increased number of student emails they received and their attempts to maintain contact during the chaotic pandemic semester. As one instructor noted, "Chasing after students to turn in assignments and fulfill course requirements was very time consuming. Being compassionate and flexible was necessary and the best way under the circumstances, but it was a lot to ask." Another commented, "Setting up group work and discussion is incredibly time-consuming, and monitoring and responding to 30 plus groups even more so."

While both the quantitative and qualitative portions of our survey indicated instructors greatly increased their workload, including their efforts to offer extra empathy and support to students during the pandemic semester, it will be critical for successful online teaching in the future to find ways to maintain quality educational experiences without instructors burning themselves out. As one example, Borgman and McArdle highlight the importance of crafting a realistic, practical approach to online teaching. Besides their emphasis on building attentive, personable relationships with students, they focus on strategic prioritization in the design, instruction, and administration of their courses. In explaining this focus, they write: "[P]lanning a responsiveness strategy for your administrative style, course design, and instruction is essential for success as an online instructor … [Y]ou need to set expectations with your students … in order to create a process of response that is doable and works for you in the long run" (65-66). A critical take-away in thinking about the workload of teaching online is that instructors need to develop intentional, manageable approaches that attend to both student learning and instructor well-being.

Pedagogy-driven Instead of Technology-driven Online Teaching

Many instructors who were new to online teaching as a result of COVID-19 initially assumed that their biggest priority was gaining more technical experience. Like most institutions, our campus underwent a short hiatus in instruction to give faculty time to transition their teaching online. During this pause, our campus-wide instructional technology department made numerous learning management systems (LMS), Zoom, and other technical training webinars readily available. While most department instructors availed themselves to some of these offerings, many soon realized that the basic mechanics of our LMS (for those who weren't already using it) and applications like Zoom were relatively easy to use.

Prior scholarship in OWI (Borgman and McArdle; Kastman Breuch; Selfe; Warnock) has shown that while technological issues are important concerns for instructors, the work of teaching online, especially for first time instructors, should be more profoundly shaped by pedagogical considerations. The final three questions in our survey investigated these ideas. In the first, we asked

participants what resources, training, or other assistance would be most valuable in easing their workload to teach future online classes. We provided a list of possibilities and asked them to mark all that applied. While responses indicated a desire to learn more about the upcoming (pre-planned) campus transition from the Blackboard LMS to Canvas and what we called "other technologies beyond the basics for teaching and/or student work (e.g., podcasts, YouTube videos, screencasting, and/or web- or texting-based applications, etc.)," 76% of participants marked an interest in learning more about "online pedagogy (e.g., strategies for creating student-student and student-faculty interactions, producing accessible materials, etc.)."

A desire for pedagogical rather than technological support was further demonstrated by the two open-ended questions that closed our survey. These questions asked about the top two or three things participants were spending additional time on and what other information they would like the department to know about their online teaching experiences. The most striking take-away was that instructors really wanted to know not just how to use relevant applications, but how to transform in-person classroom practices, such as creating community and encouraging engaged student participation, into ones that worked in online spaces.

Since its emergence in the early 1980s, the field of computers and composition has examined the intersection of technology and the teaching of writing in in-person, hybrid, and online contexts. While these scholar-teachers have often been enthusiastic explorers of new technologies, they also have a long history of critical interrogation of how these technologies both shape and are shaped by pedagogy. Perhaps the most central mantra has been that pedagogy, not technology, should drive teaching (Cook; Johnson and Arola; Selfe; Warnock; Warnock and Gasiewski). This belief is echoed in OWI literature and professional organization position statements such as those from the Global Society of Literacy Educators (GSOLE) and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) where they remind readers that "An online writing course should focus on writing and not on technology orientation or teaching students how to use learning and other technologies" (CCCC *A Position Statement*).

One of the most revealing comments in our survey focused on the perceived need to redesign curriculum and pedagogy around available technologies. This was most notable in regard to feeling an implicit pressure to utilize synchronous teaching modalities and technologies such as Zoom. As one respondent commented, "I am not comfortable using Zoom for 'live' class meetings; therefore, I hope we will be given the option to teach asynchronously instead of synchronously." Despite there being no explicit requirement or even encouragement to use Zoom, it was part of nearly every email, IT department webinar, Teaching

Center message, and listing of online resources shared across campus. This comment highlights an important point in the technology vs. pedagogy debate. Rather than making classroom decisions based on pedagogical commitments, student needs, workload considerations, and other concerns, many teachers felt an unspoken pressure to try to mirror the experience of their in-person classrooms through live video presentations and class discussions. While Zoom and other synchronous technologies can certainly support specific pedagogical goals, the important point here is that decisions about whether or not to use them should be based on an instructor's teaching goals and learning outcomes, rather than their technological abilities to replicate an in-person structure that isn't always superior.[6] Particularly with the teaching of writing, there can be a number of benefits to an asynchronous, hybrid, or low-tech approach.

In his 2009 book, *Teaching Writing Online: How and Why,* Scott Warnock advocates for the important role asynchronous activities can play in online writing instruction. One benefit he notes is the way this mode can encourage conversation among a greater diversity of students as they have time to think about and respond to complex ideas. Rather than the rapid pace of an in-person or live virtual discussion and the hesitations some students have about contributing while on the spot, asynchronous opportunities can relieve some of the pressure students feel about adding their voices and ideas (69-70). Additionally, for composition instructors specifically and for other faculty wanting to support development of critical, discipline-specific writing practices more broadly, asynchronous discussion takes place through writing. Not only does this increase the quantity of the writing students do, the interaction with their peers *through writing* offers greater opportunities to develop such practices as audience awareness, clarity, persuasion, use of sources, and more.

Beyond the pedagogical decisions about whether to use a synchronous or asynchronous format or about whether to use a specific tool such as Zoom, instructors need to attend to other social, economic, and privacy considerations relating to their students. While live video conferencing applications can help to create a sense of presence and classroom community in online spaces, they also come with significant potential downsides. One concern is that technologies, such as Zoom, can be bandwidth-intensive and often work best on laptops/desktops rather than mobile devices. As the long-discussed digital divide persists, uneven access to technology and internet connectivity can replicate systemic inequality in the education system. As educators, we need to be attentive to which technologies we use so that we support the success of all our students rather than perpetuating various forms of privilege and gatekeeping.

Further, others (Finders and Muñoz; Sonnemaker) have suggested that Zoom and similar video-based synchronous technologies literally open a portal into students' living spaces in ways that can violate privacy, highlight socio-

economic inequities, and put them (or those they live with) at risk. Although the survey comment noted above seems like a straightforward choice between modalities, the work cited in this section illustrates just a few of the many considerations that should play a role in instructors' choices about technology so that student participation can be maximally-inclusive and equitable. The key point here is not that any of these tools are inherently problematic, but that instructors should think first about pedagogical considerations, learning goals, and student realities rather than starting with available technologies.

Personal and Professional Well-being in Teaching Online

One of the most striking findings from our survey was the personal and professional toll teaching exclusively online took on instructors. While increased workload was certainly part of this, responses also included comments about feelings of depression, isolation, and even despair. In response to the survey question asking about what instructors would like the department to know about their online pandemic teaching experience, approximately 25% of respondents wrote about missing connections with individual students and larger in-person communities of learners. While half of our survey respondents had prior experience teaching some of their courses online, many of them wrote about the sense of disconnection when all of their courses went online. As one of these OWI-experienced respondents reported, "I've taught a limited number of classes online for several years and enjoyed it. I actually advocated that the department offer more courses online. No more … I found the constant mediation (via technology) depressing. I felt totally disconnected from my students, who simply didn't exist for me as people at the end of the semester."

While it has not been a central focus of research, considerations of the social, personal, and emotional impact on instructors do come up in OWI literature, even among strong proponents. As Palloff and Pratt warn, "Online there is a greater possibility for a sense of loss … loss of contact, loss of connection, and a resultant sense of isolation. Consequently, attention should be paid to the intentional development of presence" (31). Similarly, Conceição and Lehman remind readers that "the online environment is elusive" and we can lose a sense of closeness with our students (11). No longer are instructors able to rely on eye contact, body language, and the nuance of voice to help us connect with students. No longer can students linger after class or casually drop by an instructor's office in the same ways that allow for casual conversations and the building of community. As a result, many online instructors can feel a lack of engagement that may have been central to their in-person teaching experiences.

Although social and emotional issues have typically been discussed from a student perspective, our survey suggests that concerns over (lost) interpersonal connection and classroom community can be equally important for instructors. More than a decade ago, Palloff and Pratt focused on the concept of "social presence" and the key role it can play in reducing "social distance between all participants" and making the online teaching/learning experience feel more "human" (12). More recently, Borgman and McArdle, highlighting the emotional aspects of writing, note that "When writing instruction moves online, connecting with students proves more challenging" (18). Creating a sense of classroom community is not only central to the learning experience of students, but also to the personal and professional well-being of teachers. Although rethinking how to build interpersonal connections in online classroom settings is complex, I will offer some practical recommendations in the final section of this article.

Pedagogies of Logistics

When asked what two to three tasks instructors spent additional time on in the online COVID-19 spring, survey respondents reported a wide range of activities. One common thread, though, was logistical planning and correspondence with students. This included "creating 'detailed' notes for each slide in a PowerPoint presentation," "data entry" in the LMS, "answering emails," and "organizing my thoughts into well written paragraphs instead of loose outlines." Of particular note, though, was the effort expended to write clear, explicit instructions, the need to send multiple reminders to students about due dates (with one person referring to this as "hand-holding"), and answering a flood of individual student questions via email. While many respondents saw this work as essential to supporting student success in an online setting, others implied that attending to these logistical details was a time drain that took away from the "real" work of teaching.

Many of the challenges instructors faced were, of course, the result of the abrupt, unexpected shift to the online environment. As many OWI scholars have suggested, much of successful online teaching is preparation, particularly on the front-end of the course design process. Time for developing materials, outlining regular procedures for submitting assignments and interacting with classmates, and pre-loading some content into an LMS would have reduced many of these issues. Attending to logistical concerns as pedagogy is so critical in online teaching that it is outlined in twelve examples of effective practice in the CCCC position statement on online writing instruction. For example, the statement advocates for the use of explicit, text-centric, plain language in instructions and for the use of "redundancy and repetition" in explaining concepts (CCCC *A Position Statement*). As the CCCC statement, along with

many OWI scholars, stress, there is a significant need for detail, clarity, and redundancy in communication with students.

The work of writing teachers in helping students develop a diversity of contextually-, generically-, and rhetorically-savvy writing practices is complex. Conveying the logistics that scaffold students' learning of these practices is similarly challenging, but it is a core part of our responsibility. As nearly every readiness survey for students planning to take an online course emphasizes (Darby and Lang xxi), students need to be able to work independently, to navigate course materials, and to understand how to take initiative in their learning experiences. However, an essential responsibility of faculty is to facilitate this learning through clear communication and organization. Such work is not hand-holding or "just" clerical, but rather, is a key pedagogical orientation that helps to structure students' day-to-day and term-long learning. It works to highlight specific expectations about their efforts and offers them pathways into being more intentional about the activities they undertake. It also provides critical feedback as students check their own understandings of what is happening and demonstrates instructors' attentiveness to their learning needs. And, perhaps just as importantly, clear, consistent communication models writing practices that attend to rhetorical purpose and audience awareness. Although survey respondents' experiences with increased logistical communication was likely heightened due to the general disorientation caused by the pandemic, attention to these concerns will remain critical to OWI pedagogy and student success.

Moving Beyond Pedagogical Triage: Some Recommendations and Best Practices for Teaching Writing Online

There is a rich body of existing scholarship on online writing instruction. I have drawn on a few of these important pieces above but certainly can't fully represent the field's breadth and depth. What I will do here, though, is highlight a few recommendations and pedagogical practices intended to address concerns raised in our survey. These are meant as practical take-aways for OWI pedagogy, course planning, and day-to-day instruction, especially for instructors or programs that are new to teaching in online modalities.

Managing Workload

Any way you approach it, online instruction requires significant time. It takes thoughtful planning, regular interaction, and a willingness to make adjustments on the fly. However, this doesn't mean that instructors have to work to the point of burnout. Making a few strategic choices can streamline instructors' workloads and make experiences more productive for learners. Here are a few suggestions:

- Outline schedules with at least the key milestones/due dates *before* the term begins. While it makes sense to leave space for student contributions to course design, as well as our own adjustments to learning needs, a well-planned schedule is a crucial starting point in any online course (Darby and Lang; Warnock). Not every moment of a course needs be mapped but providing students with significant milestones upfront can, as Borgman and McArdle suggest, help instructors to "create an open and accessible space that allows for student success" (67).
- Consider using a consistent weekly schedule (e.g., a synchronous session early in the week, asynchronous/collaborative work later in the week, and/or all work being due by Sunday at 11:59 p.m.). As Warnock suggests, "Because students in an OW course do not have the built-in structure of attending class every two or three days, you should create repetitive, predictable deadlines to help them feel anchored to the weekly work in the course" (143). If students have a set routine for participation, they are more likely to get work accomplished and to do it on time. This approach also helps instructors manage their own schedules by knowing when they will have student work to respond to.
- Outline clear guidelines and boundaries about when and how you will be available. Because so much of our lives are online now, it is easy to expect instantaneous replies. Several respondents in our survey reported that students emailed requests for feedback or Zoom appointments late at night and expected responses by morning, leaving both instructors and students frustrated. Establishing clear rules about availability and in what timeframe students can expect to hear back is important (Borgman and McArdle; Conceição and Lehman). Besides being consistent for students, it can help instructors feel like they aren't always on the clock.
- Keep any presentations short, whether recorded or live, and focus on a few key ideas rather than trying to cover everything. Studies show that videos longer than 20 minutes rarely get watched all the way through and that videos that are six minutes or shorter are ideal (Guo et al. 44). This is not because students have short attention spans, but because this type of learning doesn't require active engagement with the content. Even when you have a lot of material to cover, best practices suggest chunking information across several shorter videos (Douglas 0:35-1:27). This kind of micro-lesson allows instructors to capture students' attention and convey the most

important points while also reducing time instructors spend recording and editing long videos.

- Be strategic about time. We need to approach our workloads in ways that are manageable while prioritizing what's most important from pedagogical and learning outcome perspectives. We should focus our energies on activities we see as most valuable for students' writing development and make choices to reduce or eliminate activities that might be seen as busy work. Rather than requiring assignments to account for students' time in a one-to-one ratio (such as when they would typically attend an in-person class), we should strive for purposeful activities that scaffold learning for larger projects. As Heidi Harris highlighted in a recent Keynote address on OWI, "less is more" when we focus not on counting student contributions but, instead, on helping them to "attend, organize, and integrate" the knowledge and practices of our courses (Harris 11:11-18:00).

Beginning from Pedagogy, Not Technology in Online Instruction

When the CCCC put out its *Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices on Online Writing Instruction* in 2013, chief among their recommendations was that "An online writing course should focus on writing and not on technology." These understandings of the pedagogical complexity of teaching online are echoed by scores of other scholars who write about the critical importance of focusing first on writing pedagogy and student learning (Selfe), creating community (Palloff and Pratt), incorporating opportunities for both low- and high-stakes writing activities (Warnock and Gasiewski), devising methods for instructors to be accessible and responsive to students (Borgman and McArdle), leveraging technologies, modalities, and resources in strategic ways (Hewett and Ehmann; Mick and Middlebrook), and supporting diverse student learners (Gos; Miller-Cochran; Oswal). A commonality in all of this work is that pedagogical commitments, not technological capabilities, should be the driving force in designing online writing courses. In working from this central tenant, I offer the following recommendations for planning online writing instruction:

- Begin by reflecting explicitly on pedagogical commitments. As Darby and Lang argue, "when you backward design a college course, … [you] should begin the course-planning process by focusing first on the most essential goals that we have for our students" (8). Only then, should instructors move on to developing course content and methods for delivery. In keeping with this approach, instructors might start by asking what is central from teaching an in-person

course to carry over into the online classroom. Once disciplinary and pedagogical commitments have been identified, it is then time to think about specific technologies that can help achieve these goals.

- Consider the learning outcomes and experiences that are integral for student learning. As outlined by the CCCC *Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing*, the primary goal for college composition courses is to help students develop critical approaches to reading, analysis, and writing. Often, this is done not through lecturing, but through activities that have students negotiate different perspectives by discussion with peers and through their own writing, which help them think about rhetorical considerations, such as addressing varying audiences and utilizing credible, persuasive evidence. OWI instructors can begin with identifying *what* these goals are rather than feeling pressured about *how* goals will be accomplished through specific modalities (synchronous/asynchronous), LMS features, and other technologies/applications.
- Remember that a fundamental principle of our work as writing teachers is inclusivity and helping students develop communication practices that will support their successes in a variety of academic, professional, and personal contexts. To do so, we need to make our courses accessible to all in terms of both content and technology (CCCC *Principles*; GSOLE). There is a constant evolution in what is considered the next best tool, but not all students nor faculty will have the hardware, software, connectivity, and digital literacies necessary to access it. Although comprehensive data about technology access for both students and instructors in higher education remains scarce, anecdotal evidence from the popular press and social media groups such as the Higher Ed Learning Collective make clear that both access and digital literacy skills among students and faculty are radically uneven. As one example from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* outlines, faculty and students in many rural, tribal, and two-year college settings face significant issues of access to computers and internet connectivity (McMurtrie). The range of pedagogical considerations related to technology is complex, but keeping these at the forefront of planning is essential. One small strategy for being more technologically inclusive is to offer an informal survey about these issues at the beginning of any online course and then to make adjustments based on student realities. Another strategy is to prioritize reliance on technologies that require low bandwidth, that are open source, and that are easy to learn or intuitive to use.

- Build in opportunities for students to contribute to course design and choice of technologies. As Greer and Harris argue, "using UX [user experience] principles in OWI invites students to participate" in making choices about course design and technology use, thus "moving them from passive recipients to active shapers of course design and content" (17). By taking a UX approach, such as asking students to brainstorm and develop learning activities from their perspective or offering them opportunities to propose and use everyday technologies in the classroom, students can feel more engaged because they have a voice in how a course is designed. Although such openness in instructional planning is a challenge because it necessarily leaves space for student input on course activities, "a user-centered mindset returns students to the center of the conversation" so that "teachers and students, not technology, shape learning experiences" (23).
- Understand that students, especially those who experienced the suddenly online COVID-19 spring, can be uncomfortable with taking online classes. As many OWI scholars (Griffin and Minter; Palloff and Pratt; Warnock and Gasiewski) argue, not all students are a good fit for learning in online environments and may take online courses out of necessity rather than by choice. As instructors, we can design our courses in ways that ease their concerns and set them up for success. One way to start this process is by crafting a short statement for syllabi about teaching commitments and how the course is designed as a supported, manageable learning experience. Instructors can also make transparent the reasoning behind instructional decisions (Darby and Lang), helping students to know what they will be doing and why. Lastly, instructors can plan for ways to accommodate student realities and convey this willingness to be adaptable to the class.

Creating Connection, Improving Personal/Professional Well-being, and Reducing (Online) Social Distance

As Borgman and McArdle emphasize, "... online writing instruction doesn't have to be impersonal or isolating just because you never get to actually meet in person. In fact, being personal is one of the most important things you can do as an online writing instructor in order to forge connections with your students" (18). Building interpersonal relationships not only helps students to be active participants in our learning communities, it helps us as instructors to feel connected as well. Further, this sense of social presence for instructors

and students alike can help to reduce isolation when we are physically separated and can create a sense of accountability as we know others are interacting with our ideas and work. Here are a few suggestions:

- Provide an instructor introduction. Just as they would in an in-person class, students want to know more about the instructors that will facilitate their learning. Besides building ethos around one's background as an instructor, introductions help students see instructors as more accessible (Darby and Lang; Warnock). Introductions can include a few personal details (such as pets or hobbies) and/or a simplified description of a teaching philosophy.
- Encourage student introductions. This common activity, whether in-person or online, helps to break the ice, highlight shared interests, and build community. It can also serve as a good foundation for participation and the value of discussion as it gets students talking in a low-stakes way. Students can post a short bio, create a personal introduction on a discussion thread, or share other details that can help develop a sense of presence. Availability of student-created introductions helps instructors and students to put names to faces and to have fewer interpersonal barriers in communication.
- Do short, informal conversation starters on a regular basis. Instructions can make space for informal conversation by, for example, sharing a favorite meme or photo that represents how the weekend went or a song at the top of everyone's playlist or anything else that is quick, informal, and gets students talking to one another. Erica Stone argues that while small questions "may seem trivial, personal conversations like these help connect coursework to the outside world" (Stone 1:10:26-1:10:30). Ideas for these activities abound online, but the point of doing them is connection and community building so that everyone feels less distant.
- Make explicit requirements for establishing and maintaining social presence. By setting expectations about the kinds of engagement instructors want in the course and then modeling that for students, they can help to encourage a greater sense of presence and involvement (Borgman and McArdle). This can be included in syllabi and activity directions, but it can also be reiterated more informally throughout the term. This helps students see that beyond a course requirement, being socially present has the benefit of connecting them with others.

Approaching Logistics as Pedagogical

On the surface, logistics and class housekeeping seem relatively mundane and straightforward. However, without an in-person setting where students often seek quick clarification before, during, or after class, details need to be communicated more explicitly. Conveying information about scheduling, assignments, due dates, and similar subjects are not just course management details, but important elements of a pedagogy committed to students' success. They help students organize their time, understand requirements, and make connections between different components of our classes. As Borgman and McArdle argue, this work is "architecting" the user (student) experience and is a critical part of supporting student learning outcomes (3). Here are a few strategies:

- Recognize that clarity in language is critical but isn't as easy to write as it might appear. As anyone who has taught (or done) the infamous technical communication assignment to write directions for making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich can tell you, writing out every step of a task is harder than it seems. As writers strive to be explicit, they also need to balance these efforts with concision. This is the central challenge of any written communication sent to students and is a critical component of any online course. Recognize the importance of this communication task and take time to do it well as it connects to student success.
- Send a weekly message. One place where clear, concise messaging can be especially useful is in a weekly plan sent to students outlining upcoming activities. While students should have a syllabus and schedule they can check at any time, consistent updates previewing the week's work and due dates brings this information into the short-term and helps students incorporate it into their workflow. As Darby and Lang remind us, "... online learners are often unaware of the level of self-direction it takes to persist and succeed in a class" (149). Instructors can help students become better at directing their own learning and achieving course outcomes through consistent messaging.
- Consider conveying key information in multiple ways for redundancy and clarity. As above, being explicit in communication and directions can be challenging and sometimes we don't anticipate where students will run into problems. One approach to addressing this is to convey critical information, like project instructions, in multiple ways. Redundancy, such as presenting instructions in a synchronous discussion, providing written directions, and creating

a short video or annotated written walkthrough, can help ensure that students see and take in information.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The four themes that emerged from our department survey highlight a number of important considerations for writing instructors and programs as we continue teaching writing online in a future beyond the pandemic. These findings reinforce the work of OWI scholars who have offered theoretical and practical frameworks for navigating the pedagogical challenges in online settings.

Because of its focus on a local context and its small sampling of instructors, this survey had a number of limitations. Beyond its limited scale, the survey also primarily captured the experience of non-tenure line instructors with exceptionally high teaching loads, including many without extensive backgrounds in composition studies. Further, participants in this survey teach students in a large, urban, public university. While our campus is racially- and socioeconomically-diverse, the context of our geographical setting and student population is hardly universal and representative. And, finally, this survey and the online teaching experience on which it was based was conducted in the midst of a once-in-a-lifetime (we hope) pandemic. Faculty and students were often working under not just difficult, but sometimes tragic conditions. How large-scale OWI might look and feel when people are not struggling with issues of illness, unemployment, living/working/sharing space with and/or caring for family or roommates 24/7 will likely be significantly different.

Still, while the survey reported here has these and other limitations, it also points to several directions for future research. Among the most critical is a need to find out more about how the ensuing year of training, planning, and teaching online changed (or didn't) faculty's perceptions and pedagogical practices once the abrupt shift in spring 2020 was over. What did faculty and programs learn about what worked from a pedagogical perspective? What additional professional development and ongoing support was undertaken and what is still needed? How did online teaching work in a variety of contexts, such as in courses with low, discipline-recommended enrollment caps and in departments that serve highly diverse student populations and/or those that are located in rural, marginalized, or technologically underserved communities? In what ways did (and does) online teaching offer means to reimagine or extend the discipline's critical work in developing anti-racist pedagogies and writing practices and in addressing other social justice concerns? And, importantly, what can researchers learn from students about their online educational experiences? In what ways did they feel challenged, supported, or stretched

beyond their capacities, and how can we evolve our curricula, pedagogies, and priorities to meet their learning needs? As the long-term implications of the pandemic for higher education unfold over the coming years, both local and large-scale studies examining questions like these will be critical in addressing our disciplinary priorities in the context of online writing instruction.

Conclusion

In a joint statement responding to the COVID-19 pandemic released on June 26, 2020, the Council of Writing Program Administrators and the Conference on College Composition and Communication reminded teachers and institutions of the high stakes surrounding writing instruction in higher education. We should be particularly attentive to whichever in-person, hybrid, or online form our instruction takes, they argue, because "Nearly all college students take a first year writing course, one that can serve as a 'gatekeeper' for access to other courses across the curriculum, to upper-division writing course requirements, to graduation, or to other curricular options" (CWPA and CCCC). As a result, our pedagogical decisions, both programmatically and in individual courses, should remain focused on our "core principles" of effective writing instruction and should be "acutely sensitive to the way that they may affect" access to higher education, student retention, and academic progress (CWPA and CCCC). Although we will continue to experience instructional and pedagogical challenges as we move between in-person and online teaching in the months and years ahead, our professional commitments and the choices we make in relation to technology will be central to our students' success as writers.

In reflecting on instructors' experiences in the local context of this survey and offering some practical recommendations, it is my hope that faculty and programs across the field can build on their already existing writing pedagogies and commitments to student success to create productive online teaching and learning experiences. By focusing first on our disciplinary commitments and then considering how we can use technology to support those values through our pedagogical practices, we can develop online instruction that is mindful of our working conditions and that engages and supports students in becoming better writers no matter the modality in which we interact with them.

Notes:

1. I want to thank my departmental colleagues for their responses to the survey discussed here. I also want to offer a special thanks to Jamie Madden and Amber Anaya for the detailed conversations we had about the findings and the implications they have for our online writing instruction workload.

2. As context, my department of 90 faculty is staffed largely by full-time (35%) and part-time (55%) lecturers who teach up to five courses a semester at our institution (with some teaching additional courses at the many two-year schools in our area). Lecturers hold MAs or MFAs in composition or a variety of writing-aligned (e.g., English or creative writing) disciplines and typically have one- or three-year employment contracts. Tenure-track faculty, who teach between one and four courses per term, depending on administrative assignments, make up only 10% of our instructors. Additionally, we employ a varying number of graduate teaching associates each semester who serve as instructors of record for their own courses.

3. For various administrative and political reasons pre-pandemic, my department previously required certification prior to any online teaching assignment and enrollment in such training was intentionally restricted to a small number of instructors. Access to training certification and online teaching assignments was a point of tension in our department prior to the pandemic. For a fuller discussion of these local challenges and choices, see my forthcoming article in *Research in Online Literacy Education,* "Cultivating a Shared Vision: Crafting a Communal Policy and Pedagogical Guidelines for Online Writing Instruction."

[4.] I checked with the institutional review board at my university and was advised that I did not need human subjects approval to write about these findings because the survey was undertaken as a program assessment. No personally identifiable information was collected as part of the survey, no one is identifiable in this manuscript, and the survey/responses are not accessible nor searchable online for those not involved with the department committee who collected this information.

5. Our department has advocated to administrators for years for a reduction in enrollment caps to be in line with recommendations of no more than 20 students per writing course set by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Teaching up to 150 students per semester was already an intense workload prior to COVID-19 and certainly exacerbated the toll taken on instructors in the shift to teaching online.

6. The standardized student learning outcomes for our department's three required lower division writing courses underwent substantial updating and revision in 2017-2018 in line with disciplinary work in rhetoric and composition. While all faculty have pedagogical freedom to choose how those goals are achieved in their classrooms, their curricula must be shaped to these learning outcomes.

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Appendix

Department Online Workload Survey

This short survey (5-10 minutes) is designed to assess faculty increased workload concerns required by online instruction, identify topics for future professional development, and uncover resources faculty will need to teach online.

Please complete and submit the survey by Friday June 5 so that we can best help all our teachers prepare for teaching a full semester online. Thank you!

Please choose the option that best describes your position in the department:

- Tenured/Tenure Track Faculty
- Lecturer
- Teaching Associate

Please indicate the number of classes you expect to teach in the department in Fall 2020

- 5
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1
- 0

Please indicate the number of course preps you expect to have in the department in Fall 2020

- 5
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1
- 0

Had you taught online prior to Spring 2020

- Yes
- No

How much additional time did you spend preparing for and implementing the transition from face-to-face courses to online courses in March?

- 0-2 hours per course
- 2-4 hours per course
- 4-6 hours per course
- More than 6 hours per course

In your best estimation and in relation specifically to online teaching, how much additional time ABOVE your normal preparation did you spend planning, teaching, grading, or communicating in the SPRING semester with students per working day since our transition to online teaching?

- 0-2 hours per course
- 2-4 hours per course
- 4-6 hours per course
- More than 6 hours per course

How much additional time do you anticipate you will spend preparing for and implementing the transition in Fall 2020 from teaching face-to-face courses to online courses?

- 0-2 hours per course
- 2-4 hours per course
- 4-6 hours per course
- More than 6 hours per course

In your best estimation and in relation specifically to online teaching, how much additional time ABOVE your normal preparation do you anticipate to spend planning, teaching, grading, or communicating in the FALL semester with students per working day in order to teach online?

- 0-2 hours per course
- 2-4 hours per course
- 4-6 hours per course
- More than 6 hours per course

What resources, training, or other assistance would be most valuable in easing your workload to teach classes online in the fall? (Please mark all that apply)

- Blackboard Basics (making announcements, creating assignments, grading assignments, generating discussion threads)
- Canvas Basics (navigating Canvas, understanding Canvas' differences from Blackboard, creating, posting, and accessing assignments and documents, grading assignments, generating student discussion, tracking final grades)
- Slide Presentation applications (using PowerPoint and Google Slides)

- Web Conferencing 101 (using applications like Zoom to hold conferences, record lectures, host live class meetings)
- Online Pedagogy (e.g. strategies for creating student-student and student-faculty interactions, producing accessible materials, do I embrace or abandon quizzes?, etc.)
- Other technologies beyond the basics for teaching and/or student work (e.g. podcasts, YouTube videos, screencasting, and/or web- or texting-based applications, etc.)
- Other

What are the top 2-3 things you are spending additional time on that you would not in teaching a face-to-face course?

What other information would you like to tell the department about your experiences teaching online?