



# Research in Online Literacy Education

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# Editor's Note

## Mapping the Landscape of Online Literacy Education in 2019

**Michael Greer**

University of Arkansas at Little Rock

As *ROLE* enters its second year, we are pleased to publish this issue that offers a provisional map of the landscape of online literacy education. You will come away from this issue with a heightened awareness of the fact that we are at a turning point in our research as online learning continues to grow. We do not yet know enough about the global contexts of our work, nor do we know enough about our students and their experiences in and with online courses. But this issue begins to map out some outlines of what that work might look like. I suspect this issue will generate discussion and point to future research that will shape our field for the decade ahead.

As the G in GSOLE signifies, online literacy education takes place in a global environment. How well do educators understand this international landscape? What questions do we need to be asking about the international contexts of online teaching and learning? The first article in *ROLE* 2.1 presents a multivocal, collaborative response to these questions. Growing out of the 2018 GSOLE online conference, "Perspectives on Teaching Writing Online in Global Contexts: Ideas, Insights, and Projections" offers a provocative, wide-ranging discussion that readers will want to extend and continue in their own work. Yvonne Cleary, Rich Rice, Pavel Zemliansky, and Kirk St. Amant address a series of questions about the potentials, challenges, development, strategies, and projections for the future of global online writing instruction. The discussion, moderated by Jessie C. Borgman, offers a powerful call to think globally when we teach online. Readers are encouraged to consider how they might apply and build on the ideas



presented here in order to expand both their understanding of and practices related to teaching in global spaces.

Anchoring this issue are two articles that report on a 2017 survey of online writing students in the U.S. As the authors note, student voices have been largely absent from the conversation about effective practices in online writing instruction. When we do survey students, as the “Report on a U.S.-Based National Survey of Students in Online Writing Courses” does, we discover that “students valued instructor expertise and feedback” but “they did not know how the courses helped them improve their writing.” Authors Diane Martinez, Mahli Xuan Mechenbier, Beth L. Hewett, Lisa Meloncon, and Heidi Skurat Harris (with Kirk St.Amant, Adam Phillips, and Marcy Irene Bodnar) present an analysis of the survey data that should be required reading for all online instructors: “the potential to learn should not only be apparent to instructors and administrators in the form of course learning outcomes—it should be made apparent to students.”

How do we begin to translate these findings into practice? This question is addressed in the second part of this survey project. In “A Call for Purposeful Pedagogy-driven Course Design in OWI,” Heidi Skurat Harris, Lisa Meloncon, Beth L. Hewett, and Diane Martinez highlight some of the qualitative data from the open-ended questions in the 2017 national survey. In short, this article asserts, “OWI has reached a point in its development that instructors and administrators need to move from what should be included in an OWC and why it should be included to how to improve pedagogical practices in OWCs.” “A purposeful pedagogy-driven course design,” as this essay argues, “must move away from focusing first on texts, assignments, or technologies and toward focusing on the students—the learners—as the necessary first step of effective course design.” The article concludes with a series of next steps that will launch a discussion that may well animate and shape work in our field for years to come.

Two expansive technology reviews offer assessments of affordable platforms for e-portfolios and a discussion on how to use VoiceThread to enrich online discussions; and five outstanding book reviews will help *ROLE* readers add to their to-be-read stacks. Happy reading!

# Articles

## Perspectives on Teaching Writing Online in Global Contexts: Ideas, Insights, and Projections

**Yvonne Cleary**

University of Limerick

**Rich Rice**

Texas Tech University

**Pavel Zemliansky**

Oslo Metropolitan University

**Kirk St.Amant**

Louisiana Tech University and University of Limerick

with **Jessie C. Borgman**

The Online Writing Instruction Community

### Abstract

Global online access has increased rapidly in the last decade, and online education has become increasingly international as a result. The challenge for writing instructors becomes addressing this new educational environment to offer effective education to globally distributed student in online classes. The four plenary speakers at the 2018 inaugural GSOLE conference discussed this context and presented ideas and opinions on this topic. This editorial is a summary of that conversation.



**Keywords:** *global, international, challenges, potentials, strategies, projections*

### **The Growing Global Nature of Online Education**

Global online access has grown by almost 900% since the year 2000, and roughly 2.5 billion persons worldwide have gained online access in the last decade (The 2006 Year-End Stats, 2009; Internet Usage Statistics, 2016). These gains in online access have brought with them new opportunities for and increased interest in expanding online education internationally. In some cases, this potential is reflected by the growing number of students pursuing online education in different nations; for example, some sources note the number of online students in the People's Republic of China is well over 70 million and growing (CWI Team, 2016). In other cases, this interest led to the forging of international collaborations that were related to developing online education options in different regions—as seen in the Indian government's partnering with the U.S.-based organization, edX, to increase online course offerings to Indian citizens (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2016).

With the global online education market projected to be worth US\$275.10 billion by 2022, interest in exploring international options for online education will certainly continue to grow (Reuters, 2017). The challenge for online educators is to understand the dynamics of the expanding and evolving nature of international online education in order to develop approaches focused on offering effective instruction in such environments (St.Amant & Rice, 2015; St.Amant, 2017). The desire to examine such contexts became a focus of the Global Society of Online Literacy Educators' (GSOLE) first international online conference.

### **Examining Global Contexts of Online Education**

In January 2018, GSOLE held its first online conference to examine aspects of teaching writing in digital spaces. Conference planners quickly identified the global dynamics of online education as an important area of focus for the event. To this end, the planning committee organized a conference plenary panel in which educators from different national, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds shared ideas, experiences, and perspectives on the current—and projected—nature of online education in writing-related disciplines. The objective was to have panel members respond to questions that examined current dynamics and prospective trends in global contexts of online education. In so doing, a panel moderator also asked participants to provide suggestions and share approaches other educators could use to better understand and provide effective instruction in such international environments. This entry contains the responses plenary panel speakers provided during that session.



The individuals who participated in the plenary session at the inaugural GSOLE conference were as follows:

- **Yvonne Cleary**, Lecturer in Technical Communication and Instructional Design at the University of Limerick, Ireland. She is program director for the MA in Technical Communication and E-Learning, a hybrid online/on-campus graduate program. She has taught online technical communication courses since 2001.
- **Rich Rice**, Professor of English in the Technical Communication and Rhetoric program at Texas Tech University, specializing in composition and rhetoric, new media, and intercultural studies. As a Fulbright-Nehru Scholar, he has taught and researched study abroad support systems and glocal communication in India. Recent research topics include online writing, multimodal composing, and intercultural communication competence. His most recent publication is a co-edited book called *Thinking Globally, Composing Locally: Rethinking Online Writing in the Age of the Global Internet* (2018).
- **Pavel Zemliansky**, Associate Professor in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric and Director of Writing Across the Curriculum at the Oslo Metropolitan University. He has taught online and mixed-mode courses in writing, rhetoric, and professional communication at the undergraduate and graduate levels at three different institutions for about 15 years. He has taught several online professional writing projects, which have involved students from the U.S. and Ukraine. He has also researched and published on international education.
- **Kirk St.Amant**, Professor and the Eunice C. Williamson Chair in Technical Communication at Louisiana Tech University. He has been a long-time researcher in the area of international online education and has taught online and hybrid classes in Belize, China, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, and the United States.

Conference organizers identified these individuals as teacher-scholars who have frequently taught in and done research on the internationalization of writing education in online environments. Each participant has experience in teaching online writing-related courses or developing online writing-focused courses and curricula in different international settings.

The session was moderated by Jessie Borgman, co-creator of The Online Writing Instruction Community.

### Organizing the Answers

For the session, presenters were provided with a list of five questions they would be asked to respond to during the plenary, and the idea was to provide attendees with multiple perspectives on topics related to the globalization of online writing education. These questions were organized to address five broad, overarching categories associated with providing online writing instruction in different international contexts. These five areas were as follows:

1. **Potentials**—To explore potential benefits of online education to greater global environments
2. **Challenges**—To identify factors affecting or impeding online instruction in international contexts
3. **Development**—To note aspects that might affect future opportunities and practices in this area
4. **Strategies**—To present suggestions for providing online writing instruction in such global spaces
5. **Projections**—To offer final thoughts, insights, or recommendations on this topic area

This entry contains their responses to these plenary session questions.

The topics covered by these individuals were broad in nature and general in scope. The idea was to create a foundation from which educators and researchers in writing studies could examine, plan for, and participate in the global development of online writing education. To this end, readers are encouraged to consider how they might apply, test, or build upon the ideas presented here to expand our understanding of and practices related to teaching writing in global online spaces.

### Potentials

*Question 1: What are the greatest potentials or actual benefits of opening online writing classes to greater global audiences (i.e., allowing students located in different nations to participate in the same online course)?*

#### Yvonne Cleary

The University of Limerick has offered the Graduate Certificate in Technical Writing online since 2001 and the MA in Technical Communication and E-Learning online since 2015. While the majority of our students are based in Ireland, recent cohorts in both of these programs have also included students from the United Kingdom, Belgium, France, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Greece, India, and the United States. This diversity also responds to current strategic initiatives within the University of Limerick to internationalize the curriculum and to

increase participation by international students in our programs, particularly at postgraduate levels. To facilitate the international learning process in these programs and courses, we use course sites within an online Learning Management System (LMS).

The strongest benefit we have observed by opening our online writing classes to international audiences is that every student has exposure to--and learns to value--cultures, perspectives, and educational backgrounds and experiences other than their own.

Specifically, for the teaching of writing, global online classes have many benefits. An online course site can become both a safe space in which to practice writing and a site for purposeful and productive exercises. Written student contributions produce a record of informal and formal discussions (e.g., online chats and discussion forums). This record can be a very helpful learning tool. Garrison et al. (2001) refer to the need to create three types of presence to support online communities of learning: teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence. Teachers can use online forums to model writing practices that they expect students to emulate. Learners can develop cognitive skills by taking time to reflect before committing to writing in asynchronous environments. This approach enables writing students to develop their ideas and to work on grammar and syntax. There are many ways in which social presence contributes to learning. For example, being able to see the work of peers encourages learners to work to achieve a similar standard. When online global writing communities are effective, it is inspiring to observe peer-supported writing taking shape 'live' through online forums. Because materials--such as podcasts, readings, worksheets, and activities--have to be developed in advance and updated regularly, a long-term outcome and benefit is a repository of learning objects, at least some of which can be reused, that support the teaching of writing.

I believe that online courses also increase equality of opportunity. Learners can take courses that match their skills, interests, and professional goals and that are affordable—perhaps while continuing in a job and regardless of the geographical location of the institution. Many of our students are returning to education and/or working simultaneously.

A further benefit is the possibility for students in one university to engage with students in other universities with minimal or no cost. For example, one project we have for the MA in Technical Communication and E-Learning, teams of writers from the University of Limerick produce documents with students from the University of Central Florida that are then translated by students at Université Paris Diderot in Paris. These writing and translation teams

operate virtually, supported by various communication technologies. (For more information on this project, see Flammia et al. 2016.)

### **Pavel Zemliansky**

I think that, if done right, such opening up of one's online courses and programs to global audiences can bring substantial benefits both to the students enrolled in those courses and to the institutions which offer them. Students would be exposed to different ways of thinking, learning, and interacting. Moreover, when it comes to instruction in professional communication, both written and oral, learning together with peers from other countries can have the potential of exposing students to real-life international and intercultural communication situations and challenges. Learning to communicate internationally, then, would move the focus from mostly theory to actually practicing international and intercultural communication.

In the areas of rhetoric and composition and in technical communication, one model of opening up online or mixed-mode courses to foreign students has been involving U.S.-based students in collaborative projects with their counterparts in other countries. Such projects are carried out online and typically result in some sort of formal product, such as a set of translated and localized texts, cross-cultural analyses of texts or websites, and others. Such projects are well-documented in published literature (see, for example, Brewer, 2016 and Maylath, 1997). Yvonne's segment mentions them as well.

Having taught several such projects, which involved students in the U.S. and Ukraine, I am always struck by how much the students learn about the processes and challenges of working in a distributed online team with members based in a different country. In my view, such projects often focus on teaching students about project management practices and overcoming communication and logistical obstacles relating to international online collaborations. Within such collaborations, these foci can sometimes be considered even more important than producing a perfect final document. It is the procedural knowledge that becomes transferrable and serves these students well in the future, both as learners and as future communication professionals.

Overall, I think the benefits of teaching online globally are similar to teaching online locally. In my view, one of the biggest promises of computer-mediated online instruction is teaching students to see learning as a social activity that is not merely mediated by machines, web interfaces, and learning managements systems. For me, online learning is interactive with



others and not merely “inhaling” knowledge from textbooks and professors. Opening up online learning spaces to global audiences can help us achieve these goals.

### **Rich Rice**

It has always been interesting to me that, over the years, bugs become features, and what we used to think about as “what we could do” has become “what we should do.” Not only can we teach reading, writing, and research with computers . . . we should. Not only can we deliver excellent writing courses online . . . we should. Simply put, using computers and offering online courses provides a better education for some learners. Similarly, I’d argue that we have moved beyond the can in terms of logistics and technology to the point where we should open classes to translocal audiences.

As Yvonne and Pavel have already mentioned, there are many potential and actual benefits. There’s increasing the number of students who are able to attend our institutions, there’s developing potential partnerships for sustainable exchange programs, and there’s giving students opportunities to experience realistic problem-solving situations, such as negotiating linguistic, cultural, social, and other differences. And opening any kind of writing classes is realistic because we know our students are increasingly getting jobs at multinational companies that make use of telecommuting and other virtual workplace practices. There’s direct, concrete recognition for each of these benefits, such as students wanting to sign up for courses that include other students from diverse background and locations.

But above all of this, there’s something more. I feel the greatest benefit of opening online writing classes to greater global audiences is such classes can teach students that with the increased capabilities of collaborating and distributing work multimodally, there are two primary concerns we must always consider when thinking about rhetorical situations. In addition to the relationship between reader, writer, and text, we must always think about location and modality. When we teach composition or technical communication online, in particular, we need to give students real, problem-based scenarios involving decision-making processes that get students thinking about cultural and technological similarities and differences; experiences that teach them intercultural communication competencies, because writing and writing online, today, are becoming ubiquitous. Otherwise, we’re in danger of graduating functionally illiterate students.

### **Kirk St.Amant**

The greatest benefit is the level of interaction that can, ideally, lead to more sophisticated thought in relation to a range of topics. It's one thing to read about what is going on in a different nation —what others think, believe, or feel in a different place—or the attitudes members of different cultures have. It's a completely different thing to be able to interact directly with individuals from other nations and cultures. That ability to interact is priceless. To ask questions to someone directly and receive answers directly from them: that is education. The ability to actually discuss ideas with someone from a completely different culture or who grew up in a different nation with very different life experiences: that is learning. The opportunity to collaborate directly with individuals who live under different legal systems and to communicate using different linguistic and rhetorical structures according to different world views that guide behavior and influence attitudes: that is the key to real, true personal growth. That's the amazing benefit opening online classes to greater global audiences has to offer all involved.

These opportunities to interact are particularly important now—more so than ever before. We're inextricably linked to a greater global context. These connections are partially economic, partially geopolitical, partially technological—but we're now all connected. This connection is why shifts in one nation can have massive effects on the dynamics of another. The better we can understand this greater international context, the more effectively we can interact and participate in it. This is the great potential of opening our online classes globally—to bring in students from other nations and cultures to learn about them (both the individuals and the nations and cultures they are from) so that we can better understand the various factors and forces affecting global society. This knowledge allows us to be more effective interactors in international exchanges so that we can become more effective participants in global society, contributors to the global economy, and agents of change in international contexts.

In essence, we're talking about the difference between reading about how to do something and actually having the opportunity to engage in it. We can read hundreds of texts on nation X or culture Y, how individuals from there think and behave, and how to communicate and interact effectively with them. But, as most of us know, reading about how to do something from this detached, second-hand perspective is extremely limiting. And these limitations can markedly affect how well we can actually perform a process when the time to do so "in the real world" comes. Imagine if our surgeons were trained only by reading about what surgery is, how certain procedures are performed, and why and how to perform them, but they had no opportunity to actually practice such processes before they began to operate on patients. Sounds crazy, doesn't it?

It's such a different experience to learn by actually having the opportunity to do and to try in the situation itself. We want to learn about how to effectively understand and interact with persons from culture A, so we read all about that culture. When the time comes to actually interact, there will be problems—lots of them—for a number of reasons. And the majority of these issues will relate to the problem of acquiring all knowledge second-hand. By opening our online classrooms to students from around the world and using these online spaces to have students from different national and cultural backgrounds interact and collaborate, we can provide students with opportunities—via direct experiences—to learn how other cultures perceive, respond to, craft messages, and engage in exchanges.

That knowledge from direct information in those classes lets students transcend many of the limitations of the second-hand approach to education, and the knowledge and skills resulting from such direct exposure is everything. It's what will help individuals around the world interact more effectively—that experiential knowledge. The foundational knowledge resulting from such primary-contact experiences is priceless in that it can be used later in life and across different topics, domains, industries, and cultures.

That's the great benefit—the amazing potential—of opening our online classes up to students (and instructors) located in different nations and from different cultural backgrounds.

## Challenges

***Question 2: What are the greatest challenges to opening online writing classes to greater global audiences (i.e., allowing students located in different nations to participate in the same online course)?***

### **Pavel Zemliansky**

I think the challenges of opening up one's online courses and programs to worldwide audiences can be broken down into two main categories. The first category speaks to the differences in approaches to teaching and learning, classroom expectations and behaviors, and conventions of learning across countries and cultures. The second category has to do with logistical and administrative challenges, such as enrollment management, cost-covering, faculty availability and qualifications, and others.

Allow me to expand on each of these categories. For the first group of challenges, most of us have heard stories about the learning styles and preferences of students from other countries

not “fitting into” what we in North America consider “appropriate” or “effective” learning behaviors. For instance, my former institution has a large international teaching initiative, which brings students from other countries to our campus and enrolls them into courses designed to prepare them for the “mainstream” American college education and experience. Faculty who teach these “preparatory” courses often lament the fact that students from certain countries, particularly Asian ones, are not willing to participate in class discussion or interact with their classmates; instead these students often defer to the expertise of their instructors or learning materials. If this problem exists in face-to-face courses, it can be further exacerbated in online environments where a lot of the learning is organized around discussion board posting and commenting and where interactions among students are extremely important.

The second category of challenges, as I stated earlier, has to do with logistical and administrative questions. For instance, in the U.S., it is more common for students who are already enrolled at an institution to take online courses offered by that institution than it is to for that institution to offer online learning opportunities to outsiders. If online courses were to be opened to world-wide audiences, institutions would need to think through questions regarding student enrollment and retainment, tuition payments, and other such administrative matters. These issues are probably not simple to solve, but the challenges they present pales in comparison to the first group of challenges I note in the first part of my answer here.

### **Rich Rice**

At my institution, we value synchronous communication in our online courses. So important is the synergy between teacher and student, between student and student, and between student and content that we have a policy that every online course will include a synchronous component. We believe in socially constructing knowledge.

Opening online writing classes to individuals in different nations—even with a synchronous requirement—is not difficult if those individuals are available to meet at the scheduled time. But, when trying to collaborate across nations and time zones, it is a major challenge to pair a classroom of students who have their own scheduling restraints with a partnering class in another region of the world. A challenge, but not impossible. There are windows of time where institutions in China and India, for instance, are meeting at the same time as institutions in the U.S. Such a pairing takes advanced planning, which can be difficult. And, of course, there are cost differences, logistical issues of getting textbooks, and ensuring accessibility.



Perhaps even more challenging—something that Pavel has alluded to—are grammar and style expectations, peer collaboration processes, and assessment measurement standards. These three components, which are central to writing classes, are highly cultural. What may be presumed standard for some students in one culture is likely not the same in another. And while an online course does not need to emphasize the same educational approach for every student—that is, different students can achieve learning objectives in unique ways and benefit from a class differently—instructors who open their classes to students located in different nations should be aware that experiences with grammar and style, with working with peers for collaborating and for revising, and with institutional standards for assessment will likely vary significantly and be a source of confusion.

### **Kirk St.Amant**

Greatest challenge? Negotiating infrastructures. Let me explain.

We're all likely familiar with the dynamics of hard infrastructures—those physical or easily identifiable, measurable, and predictable network systems that allow for the movement of goods, people, and ideas from place to place. These hard infrastructures are foundational to online access. They're the telecommunication networks that allow us to interact; they're the power grid infrastructure that allows the electronics we use to operate so that we can access the Web. They're also the transportation systems that allow us to access and purchase the hardware and software we need to get online and the financial infrastructures that coordinate purchases of goods and services, including online access itself.

Each and all of these different hard, tangible, and predictable infrastructures create challenges, for they are uneven across nations and even within nations. These disparities affect when we can interact globally (i.e., when we can access online environments). They also affect how we can interact in cyberspace (i.e., the bandwidth we have and the restrictions that creates) and what we can do online (i.e., how screen size and access to software affects the nature of exchanges). Identifying, understanding, and addressing these challenges of hard infrastructure are central to creating the kinds of easy, ready, and open international online exchanges needed to realize the benefits offered by expanding online education to increasingly wider international audiences.

But hard infrastructure is only half of the infrastructure challenge.

The other half involves soft infrastructures. These are the underlying systems and related networks that make human culture what it is. Soft infrastructures are those intangible factors of how the members of a culture behave, perceive, and interact, those things we can't see but that affect how we use technologies and approach hard infrastructures. In this case, it's a matter of understanding how cultural perspectives affect the ways in which individuals around the world view online media and what expectations they have for how to communicate via these technologies.

It also involves how cultural attitudes influence perspectives of education—what is a legitimate topic to teach and what constitutes a permissible method for teaching it—that create challenges for realizing the potential of globalizing international online educational experiences. In fact, the greatest challenge within soft infrastructures is different cultural attitudes toward online education overall and what this means for who and how individuals around the world might (or might not) participate in such educational contexts.

As with hard infrastructures, each of these soft infrastructures vary from culture to culture, nation to nation, and region to region. And each can create challenges based upon differences that can affect if and how students from different nations and cultures interact in online educational spaces. And as with hard infrastructure challenges, the root to addressing soft infrastructure differences is understanding—a true “knowledge is power” situation. We need to do more to learn about how other cultures perceive online environments, the patterns they use to engage in online exchanges, and the attitudes they have toward online education. We can then use this knowledge to devise educational approaches that are cognizant of and welcoming to the different cultural expectations. Using knowledge in this way can allow for the kinds of inclusion and interaction needed to maximize the prospective benefits of such educational spaces.

Addressing such challenges is not easy. It will require focused, sustained research to identify key aspects of different hard and soft infrastructures at work in different cultures, nations, and regions. Doing so, however, involves collaborating as we go—learning as we build international online educational spaces. By using this approach, we can create a foundation of truly new pedagogical knowledge that can guide our actions as those who provide and also receive education through international online contexts. The focus for us as teacher-researchers becomes devising partnerships and collaborations that allow us to investigate such infrastructural factors. Such partnerships must also focus on helping us pool our knowledge and

work together to develop practices, technologies, and spaces that can maximize the potentials of these new educational spaces.

It's exciting, and I look forward to working with others on these very issues as we move into these new, uncharted areas of cyberspace.

### **Yvonne Cleary**

In our university, most programs are offered in traditional classroom environments. The university has only recently begun to offer supports for online programs, courses, and environments on a sustained basis. This situation has presented both opportunities and challenges. One opportunity is that we have been able to develop programs that are more flexible, open, and student-centered than might have been the case if we were working within stricter administrative parameters.

A challenge is that the faculty members, and especially program directors, have been responsible for many marketing, program administration, and development activities that are often undertaken centrally. We have also been responsible for developing online teaching strategies. Orchestrating interactions online and fostering online communities where peers support one another is an important feature of an online writing course. This type of activity, in a global course in particular, demands intensive interactions between students and instructors and between students and students.

A second, related challenge is ensuring that online teaching receives adequate support and recognition. Many traditional teachers and administrators have limited understanding of the amount of work required to design and deliver a successful online course. Savenye et al. (2001) discuss the many supports that faculty need in order to be able to teach online effectively. These supports include training in technology, e-mentoring, and facilitation. In global online writing courses, uneven levels of language proficiency in English (or another target language) may result in a higher workload for tutors. Some learners may be native speakers while for others, English may be their second or third language. Instructors may need to offer more supports to students for whom English is not their first language, especially if correctness is an important criterion in writing assignments. That support role can be very time-consuming and should be accounted for in the tutor's teaching load—particularly for part-time/adjunct/hourly-paid teachers. Since online teaching is a new activity in our university, there is limited understanding of how time-intensive the provision of such supports can be.

Another set of challenges we have experienced are data laws and protections and how attitudes to these laws differ across countries. We have found that students based in German-speaking countries may be reluctant to conduct research with human participants or to conduct interviews with professionals, a common assignment in technical communication courses. These students have cited stricter attitudes to data protection and data storage in their countries.

## Development

*Question 3: What forces or factors do you think will affect the nature and development of global online education in the future? How do you think these forces or factors will affect the teaching or offering of online classes in writing/technical communication/composition to students located in other nations?*

### Rich Rice

No doubt everyone at this conference has a big list of forces and factors, Jessie. Certainly cost. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), for instance, have not had nearly as sustainable a following in the U.S. as they have in more highly populated countries like China and India because of the impact of the cost of education on larger populations and the need for completion certificates rather than degrees.

Another big one is sharing content and how publishers who have expertise in creating quality text, graphic, and video interactive media content can be compensated to help sustain their efforts. Yes, this will impact global online education greatly in the future. For instance, I'm just starting a project with a university in China to produce a textbook and series of videos for English majors. I'd like to be able to work with a publisher to ensure the quality of these materials and manage content distribution. While I'm okay with freely distributing some of the content, I'm concerned about that content being distributed and then taken out of context, adapted into multiple versions that misrepresent the resource, or used by people with less than accurate re-toolings. With regards to these concerns, Creative Commons licensing will only go so far.

No doubt these are concerns all publishers have, but materials that need to be created to support increasingly diverse and complex audience-aware courses must explore cross-cultural contexts in different ways. So I think cost and distribution of materials will play a role in global online education in the future. And I'm concerned about partnerships between institutions that lose sight of quality and the value of instructor motivation. That is, many institutions abroad



only want to work with top-tier institutions in the U.S. regardless of the quality of the writing program or the willingness and experience of the faculty involved. I hope, like the value of synchronous communication in online courses, global online education startups see more value in developing partnerships and content based on rhetorically-sound and -situated curriculum development rather than out-of-box turnkey solutions.

Online education, generally, can suffer from copying and pasting course materials rather than recognizing the importance of contextualizing content and teacher expertise. I know there are some organizations pushing turnkey course solutions for English departments abroad that want to develop programs in technical communication, for instance. There's a temptation to adopt wholesale, but the quality of a course and program will suffer in the long term. There are some distance education theorists who talk about how in 40 or 50 years from now, education may look a lot different; namely, every degree that is online will be a subject-specific degree based on experts from around the world rather than from one institution.

We can learn from that hypothetical model while also bringing experts from across the disciplines and across the world into our online courses. I recently read about a face-to-face class that had a large number of students from China, and the instructor was asked to explain some of the statements about culture and Tiananmen Square. The Chinese students in the U.S. told their parents in China what was being said in class, and the value differences raised concerns. I think we'll see more of this and all for good. The more we negotiate our similarities and differences in constructive ways, the better.

### **Kirk St.Amant**

The global spread of Internet access will likely be one of the biggest factors affecting the development of online education in the future. The other is the ongoing evolution of government policies and national laws affecting how, when, and who can get online to share information via digital media. While these two topics are interconnected in many ways, they can also evolve independently of each other.

The first item—extending online access—is a matter of scope, scale, and diversity in the international online educational context. Right now, roughly half of the world's population has online access. That population, moreover, is relatively concentrated in certain geographic regions and nations that represent only part of the world's cultures. In fact, you could argue that only a fraction of the world's nations is truly represented in cyberspace as the relative

population of many areas remains separated from the online world—in particular, many of the “emerging economies” of the globe.

These current limitations in international access means the global nature of cyberspace represents a certain grouping of nations, languages, and cultures engaging in exchanges. This is certainly the case for large-scale exchanges that are frequently online interactions or interactions that involve substantive exchanges of information, products, and services. As such, approaches to online education and the cultural perspectives and local realities affecting how individuals engage in online education are diverse to a degree. But they are still limited to those individuals who are online and able to engage in such opportunities.

As online access spreads to increasingly include other individuals who represent new cultural and linguistic groups or national and cultural groups who have had relatively little presence in online exchanges in the past, the range of experiences, expectations, and limitations (per geopolitical and geographic factors) will expand. All of these new aspects will need consideration to truly appreciate the growing number of cultures interacting online over time. These newer populations will likely bring new needs, requirements, expectations, and conventions to international online classes. Such factors need to be considered in order to recognize the potentials available via these new educational contexts (as noted earlier).

These factors mean that the more we can devise models for and approaches to understanding different hard and soft infrastructure factors to map, understand, and address these factors, the better we can prepare for how the growth of global online access will affect approaches to education in international online spaces.

At the same time, access to and behaviors in global online spaces are often regulated by national laws. As legal systems often differ in their approaches to online activities, they can have great implications for the globalization of online education. In some cases, these legal differences can affect the technologies (hardware and software) individuals in different nations can access and use to interact online. In others, they can encompass what individuals can do, access, or post/say in online spaces. These variations can have pronounced effects on how individuals interact in globalized education within cyberspace.

National laws, moreover, are not fixed entities. Rather, they can change over time and in response to new developments (e.g., the international spread of online access). They also evolve in relation to what the citizens and the governments of other nations do online or via

online media. These legal variables affecting the globalization of online education will create different challenges and opportunities that will continue to shape approaches to international online education over time. They will be particularly acute if the objective of international online education is to be open to and inclusive of individuals from as many nations and cultures as possible.

Moreover, as international online access expands to either include new international participants or more members of less represented nations and cultures, the number and kinds of laws affecting international online interactions will become increasingly diverse. Similarly, new international participants will bring new geopolitical factors to online educational spaces and change how different nations interact in relation to the perceived benefits (e.g., more markets) and prospective detriments (e.g., new venues for cyberterrorism) created by such international online expansion.

These legal factors represent an overall area of which educators need to keep abreast in order to remain current and adaptable. Doing so involves viewing such legal contexts as a kind of infrastructure—a hard infrastructure that exists in a tangible form one can consult in common.

This is because laws are written in permanent form to allow the members of a culture to consult them. With this approach in mind, teacher-researchers need to continually monitor and map the international legal landscape to remain abreast and adaptive to international legal factors—and the implications they have for internationalizing online education—as they change over time.

### **Yvonne Cleary**

Related to the previous point, the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was adopted by the European Union in April 2016 and will come into effect in Ireland on May 25th, 2018 (See: <https://www.dataprotection.ie/docs/GDPR/1623.htm>). This regulation is designed to strengthen data protection for all individuals within the European Union. It may have an impact on how all learners undertake certain types of assignments (see, for example, McKenzie, 2018).

Furthermore, it is likely to impact how online instructors and research supervisors hold many types of data about students and research participants. Already, we are encouraged to conduct data audits to determine how we store various types of data.

Another force affecting the nature and development of global online education in the future is the widespread availability of virtual learning platforms together with cheap, even free, teaching and learning applications. These technologies make the provision of online courses

more feasible to design and deliver. Learners can personalize their experience by accessing educational materials on any device and participating in online courses from any location. In a recent study of how students use mobile technologies to access learning materials, a colleague and I found that personalization and flexibility are essential criteria for contemporary learners (Marcus-Quinn and Cleary, 2015). Personalization also enables learners from different national cultures to tailor the learning environment and materials to their own norms, expectations, and preferences.

With more institutions seeing the benefits of opening courses to learners from different countries, it is likely that the number of online courses will continue to increase. In many institutions, mine included, internationalization is a very important strategic goal.

### **Pavel Zemliansky**

In my opinion, the two main forces that will influence online learning globally are the growing “gig economy” and the more widespread use of mobile devices and mobile internet connections. The term “gig economy” signifies the willingness of more and more people, especially millennials, to make a living by doing contract work for various clients rather than finding and staying in a job long-term. According to data from The US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), in the U.S. alone, about 16 million people are engaged in “contingent or alternative work.” This factor will affect global online education due to what I think will be an increased number of “non-traditional” students (e.g. adults who want to take online courses for very specific professional and personal reasons, such as professional credentialing). This, in turn, will necessitate a more customized approach to the design and delivery of online courses. At many institutions, this trend can be seen even now, though it typically involves U.S.-based students. For example, my former department delivered an online professional writing graduate certificate, which was largely geared towards working professionals. Faculty who taught the courses in the certificate program, including myself, had to be conscious of how what we taught will help students with their immediate professional needs. When we factor in the internationalization of online learning, complexities of designing and delivering such courses will only compound. In order to create effective and useful learning environments, faculty and institutions will have to take into account the differences between economies, labor markets, professional credentialing, and licensure in different countries and environments.

The second factor is a technological one. Despite the wide spread of mobile devices and mobile internets, online learning, at least in this country, remains pretty firmly tethered to the computer, be it a desktop or a laptop. According to a recent survey of students at two large

U.S. universities (Chen et al., 2015), 50% of respondents reported using smartphones for learning while 86% reported using smartphones daily for other, non-educational purposes. Furthermore, the same survey found that only 30% of instructors integrated mobile technologies into course assignments and projects while 55% banned mobile devices from their classrooms altogether (Chen et al., 2015). Mobile apps of even the most popular learning management systems, such as Canvas, are rather rudimentary and geared primarily towards consumption of content than towards creation and interaction. Their interfaces are less-than-intuitive and, in some cases, plain unusable.

By contrast, in Africa, for example, a lot more online learning takes place via mobile devices and on mobile phone networks. The African model of mobile learning appears to be less “tethered to a specific place,” such as a university and more “distributed” and “networked.” Authors of one study of mobile learning in Nigeria argue that this model provides for great access to education, lowers its costs, and generally democratizes it (Oluwatobi and Olurinola, 2015). Therefore, if U.S. institutions are interested in opening up their own offerings to students from other parts of the world, they will need to figure out a way to make their online offering less tethered to a specific place, campus, or department and enable more mobile learning.

### Strategies

*Question 4: What suggestions, tips, or strategies would you offer to educators who are interested opening their online writing/technical communication/composition classes to students located in other nations?*

#### Kirk St.Amant

To globalize our online courses, instructors need to take certain steps to account for the kinds of infrastructure factors (hard infrastructure and soft infrastructure) noted earlier. In terms of doing so, initial steps to take or items to consider are as follows:

**Design for minimum screen size and project out:** Instead of creating content for viewing on a desktop- or laptop-sized screen and then making a “hand-held-friendly” version, work in the opposite direction. A growing number of the world’s Internet users rely primarily on hand-held devices to access online materials. For this reason, if educators start with a focus on designing for the hand-held screen and then revise to make things “bigger” for laptop and desktop users, they can enhance the ability for the largest possible global audience to access information in a format that is easy to use, understand, and interact with.

**Avoid the need for ancillary hardware:** Access to the computing hardware needed to get online can be difficult in some parts of the globe. The ability to access other kinds of hardware (e.g., scanners or printers) in order to engage in certain kinds of online activities (e.g., print an assignment and then scan a completed version of it for upload to a class website) only complicates and limits the international audience who can participate in such activities. For this reason, designing internationalized online courses to require as little use of various hardwares as possible can extend the scope and number of students who can effectively participate in international online classes.

**Engage in redundant, parallel content distribution:** Individuals around the world have different degrees of access to certain kinds of software, and this factor can affect who, globally, can participate in an international online course in which software is essential to access and interaction. If instructors can create content to be distributed across different kinds of software (e.g., Skype and Google Hangouts) and allow students to use various kinds of software to participate in a globalized online class, they can increase both who can participate and how they can participate in such environments. This is redundant, parallel content distribution—distributing the same content across different kinds of softwares and systems to allow the broadest range of global participants to access it and participate in international online courses.

**Create parallel synchronous and asynchronous activities:** The bandwidth available to individuals can vary from nation to nation. This factor can affect how individuals in certain regions of the globe can participate in online exchanges, for low bandwidth means limited ability to participate in synchronous interactions online. Likewise, international time differences and infrastructure factors (e.g., if the power grid or the telecommunications grid regularly goes down) can also affect the ability to participate in synchronous interactions in a globalized online class. To account for this factor, instructors need to build in synchronous and asynchronous options that can facilitate as close to parallel interactions as possible in an online class. Doing so could involve coordinating when and how individuals can post to or participate in online discussions. Creating a system that allows for both options of engagement in online discussions, however, can greatly affect how many individuals around the globe can discuss and debate ideas in an international online class.

**Focus on internationally collaborative activities:** The greatest benefit international online classes offer is the ability for students to interact with and learn from individuals from other nations and cultures. The more instructors can foster such interactions in an international

online class, the more students can maximize this unique benefit of this kind of educational environment. To do so, students need to interact with such individuals. A central way of doing this is placing students into international teams that need to interact/collaborate to complete a given class activity. The more instructors can design classes to focus on such activities, the better they can provide students with the kinds of benefits this new learning context has to offer.

**Create tiered materials to address differences in student background in relation to**

**topic:** Educational systems around the world approach topics in different ways at various points in a student's educational career. This means students from different cultures can come to a class with very different levels of experience and backgrounds relating to the topic of the class. This situation can markedly affect how students interact in the class as well as how effectively they can learn in and gain from the class. To address this factor, instructors need to create "tiered" materials for students. These materials would provide information on everything from the most basic ideas and core concepts for the class to the more advanced approaches and ideas related to the course topic. The idea would be to make such materials available to all students from the start of and throughout the class. This way, students could learn about the course topic based on their prior exposure to and experiences with it as needed. Ideally, such materials provide students with no or limited background with the primer needed to interact effectively with colleagues who have more experience with the topic.

**Provide on-call and readily available technical support for all class participants:** Technical issues can prevent students from participating effectively—or at all—in an online class. Given the range of technical problems that can arise in a global context, such factors can be a continual problem in an international online class. A major problem within this context is students in other nations might not have ready (or any) access to technical support persons to help with technical issues. To address and mitigate this issue, instructors should work with their home institutions to provide such technical support services to students in other nations and provide various means (e.g., online or via phone) of accessing such support services as needed.

These are but some of the strategies educators need to consider and use when internationalizing their online classes; there are many, many more. As such, the items I've noted here are a starting point to addressing this area in terms of the broadest issues that could affect the most persons across a wide, international context. By addressing such items via the strategies noted here, educators can enhance international student participation in their online courses targeted at students located around the globe.



### **Yvonne Cleary**

It is important to spend adequate time preparing for a move to online delivery and to provide funding for resources (including teachers). Online classes require more planning and preparation than traditional classroom-based courses. Online writing classes also need to be monitored closely to ensure that students participate and respond in ways that match the instructors' expectations and the learning goals. It is a good idea to inform students of days and times when the instructor will be online and to limit online teaching and support to those times. Otherwise, it can become an all-consuming activity. In my university, we are not required to have synchronous classes, but I ensure that students know hours when I am available for consultation. I also schedule synchronous online chat for one hour per week on each course, but attendance is not compulsory. A transcript is available for students who cannot attend.

Instructors in online courses need to provide very explicit instructions. I pilot test assignment instructions before publishing them online to ensure that the procedure or requirements are clear, complete, and explicit. Clear instructions are important for native and non-native English speakers. Furthermore, I have found, particularly in my online technical communication classes, that offering content in more than one modality can improve learning outcomes. For example, I provide an audio podcast, a set of instructions, and a discussion forum for each major assignment. Offering multiple modalities helps learners with different preferences understand content and participate more effectively in online courses. It is also beneficial for students from different countries and cultures, especially if their first language is not English.

My university's Centre for Teaching and Learning conducts anonymous evaluations of teaching during or at the end of each course; this is a common practice in many institutions. The survey used by this unit only includes one general question about online delivery. I ask all students to use the survey's qualitative comments section to state what they like about online delivery and what they believe could be improved. This feedback is very helpful for the design of future online courses.

There are some very useful models of online delivery and instructional design theories that help instructors to develop pedagogically sound courses in any discipline. Two that I have found helpful for increasing student engagement are Salmon's (2013) five-stage model of teaching and learning online and Garrison et al.'s (2000) Community of Inquiry model.

### **Pavel Zemliansky**

As my co-authors and I have stated here before, to become global, we will need to adjust our expectations of what counts as “learning,” to develop pedagogies and teaching techniques that take into account national and cultural differences, and to rethink our relationship with and use of the technologies through which we deliver online instruction.

### **Rich Rice**

I want to underline each of the excellent, specific tips and strategies my fellow panelists have suggested. Opening face-to-face, hybrid, and online classes to expanded perspectives and viewpoints is critical to understanding audience and purpose today.

Here’s a more general approach to answering this questions, perhaps. You know, years ago I took an educational theory class on teaching “exceptional” learners (both those with special needs and those who need extra challenges). What stuck with me most were these three terms: wholehearted, sincerity, and responsibility. These are important terms when educators become interested in opening their online classes to students located in other nations.

Think about ways to understand the other contexts and purposes that students outside of our local situations may be experiencing. Be wholehearted in working to understand cultural differences and not from an ethnocentric perspective but from an ethnorelative perspective. That is, avoid making judgments on value differences, which may include some pretty central values such as grammar and style, and instead see it through others’ eyes. Doing so models the sorts of processes students need to learn when thinking about audience and purpose in global contexts, and writing is increasingly becoming always already global in some capacity. Rather than copy/paste content or processes, sincerely consider the “actors” in one’s class and how ways in which each student interacts with the teacher, with one another, and with the content can be explored and supported individually. Doing so will celebrate exceptional similarities and differences. And be responsible when thinking about added logistical dimensions to the class and developing fair and equitable allowances for approaching course processes in different ways.

### **Projections**

***Question 5: Any final thoughts on globalizing online education in writing/technical communication/composition?***

### **Yvonne Cleary**

Consider reviewing the sources I've cited in my earlier answers to better understand and examine this overall topic area. These are the works cited in those responses:

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### **Pavel Zemliansky**

I'd say the following:

- Be aware of the geographical and cultural differences in "communication" and "writing."
- Do not assume that your foreign students will understand or even need to understand the realities of composing, collaborating, and other aspects of professional life that are readily understood by your U.S.-based students.
- Practice cultural humility—learn from your students
- Be flexible in your technological requirements—encourage and enable the use of a variety of learning modes, tools, and techniques.

### **Rich Rice**

In composition and in technical communication, it's often useful to explain core principles by showing students what not to do. Webpages That Suck is a site I routinely show, or I use [DHMO](#) to show that we don't have to believe everything we see online. It's sometimes easier to find points of miscommunication and how, with more effort in terms of X or Y or Z, better communication in a specific situation could have happened.

I've been taking a similar approach in my teaching and research. For instance—and this is something Kirk (St.Amant), Sushil Oswal, Gustav Verhulsdonck, and many others have been thinking about in their research—it seems to me that miscommunication, especially in cross-cultural situations, can be understood in one of three categories: contact, convey, and connect.

And there's a connection to kairos. Kairos is saying the right thing in the right amount at the right time. It's timeliness. Saying the right thing, in other words knowing the right thing to say or write, means knowing an audience's perspectives and viewpoints without making judgments (contacting). As we teach in our courses, the medium and the message is the message. Form and content are important when we look at how we're reaching audiences (conveying). And knowing the right way to say it involves knowing something about the location and the best medium to use, connecting to a cultural appeal or set of core values (connecting).

As we work toward bringing multicultural opportunities to our students through online writing courses, opportunities that include opening our courses up to students from other nations in order to prepare students to write in more complex worlds and writing situations, think about how to optimize communication with students in our classes in terms of contact, convey, and connect.

### **Kirk St.Amant**

This is perhaps the most exciting time in the history of education. We are in an age of truly unmapped territory where an understanding of the new, global landscape of online education is dearly needed. Moreover, it is a time when no real rules have been established on how to address this context. Nor do we really have best practices, but we know a new kind of pedagogy—one that addresses and merges aspects of the online with those of the international—is needed. And it will continue to be a need—and become a major, growing need—over time.

These factors mean the entire topic area is wide open for all of us to contribute to and to help research, examine, and shape the new kind(s) of international online pedagogy essential to the future. We, as educators, should embrace this challenge and see it for what it is—one of the most amazing opportunities we will encounter in our careers as educators. We need to begin to explore these opportunities, try new approaches, test new materials, and develop new technologies or technological options or approaches to online education. In so doing, we also

need to catalog our actions: note what works, what does not, and why. And then, we need to share those findings with others so that we can compare what we're learning and try, test, and build on what others have done.

The best part is this situation represents a need no one person, group of persons, nation, or culture can address alone. Rather, it's a situation in which multiple parties from all cultures and nations need to participate to begin understanding such dynamics, researching such environments, and developing new approaches. Best of all, this participation needs to come from all levels within education. Students need to participate to share their views, perspectives, and experiences as key sources of data that will form the building blocks of this new pedagogy. Educators need to play a role creating, trying, and testing approaches to determine the kinds of pedagogies, technologies, and educational materials that work (and don't) in these contexts. And administrators need to participate to provide input in terms of curriculum design, program development, accreditation, and collaboration across institutions—nationally and internationally.

By working together and making our pedagogy our research, we can gain a more complete understanding of these new instructional contexts and the new pedagogies they require. By collaborating with our students, colleagues, and institutional superiors or subordinates, we can develop the kinds of courses and curricula best suited for the new nature of global education. The potential is amazing, and no part or participant is too small. The key is to begin coordinating and collaborating to share ideas, approaches, and information in ways that allow us to develop new systems that reflect the current and growing diversity of today's online environment.

Hopefully, we'll all recognize this new context as a call to action and will all do our part in answering this call. I'm hopeful, and I greatly look forward to what the future holds.

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## A Report on a U.S.-Based National Survey of Students in Online Writing Courses

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### Abstract

Best practices in online writing instruction (OWI) have been developed and refined for more than a decade. A recent report on student perception of online writing courses (OWCs) revealed an overlooked yet crucial component of OWI—the need to move from what content should be included in an OWC and toward why it should be included to how to improve pedagogical practices in OWCs. We propose purposeful pedagogy-driven course design as a

framework that emphasizes the role of the teacher in making connections across pedagogical activities to center course design on student learning.

**Keywords:** *online writing instruction (OWI), student voices, pedagogy, online writing courses (OWCs), purposeful pedagogy-driven course design*

For the fourteenth straight year, student enrollment in online classes in higher education has increased, and recent reports indicate that 32% of all students are taking at least one online class (Seaman, Allen, & Seaman, 2018). This national growth in online enrollments aligns with growth in online courses and programs in composition and technical and professional communication (TPC). For example, as of 2012, 15% of all TPC degree programs were offered fully online (Melonçon, 2012) and 21% of service courses were offered fully online or in a hybrid format (Melonçon, 2009).

These numbers strongly indicate that educators must deliver effective online instruction. Best—or, more accurately, effective—practices in online writing instruction (OWI) have been a concern for writing studies for more than a decade as evidenced by the work of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Committee on Computers in Composition and Communication and the CCCC Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction (hereafter called the OWI Committee). The OWI Committee, constituted in March 2007 (Hewett & Depew, 2015), was charged with developing a position statement of effective practices for OWI. After several years of research into the issues, the OWI Committee (2013) composed *A Position Statement of Principles and Examples of Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction* (hereafter called the OWI Principles document) that described 15 grounding principles for ethical and effective teaching of postsecondary-level writing in online learning.

These OWI principles have been key to new research into OWI because they provide a solid ground for examining both theoretical and practical challenges of OWI pedagogy and administration. They offer a position from which scholars could agree and differ, thus enriching the research and educational understanding of OWI's possible effects on student writing. However, despite its strengths, the OWI Principles document, like much of the research surrounding instruction that occurs in online environments, failed to address student needs head-on. Indeed, along with attention to pedagogical practice and growth in courses and programs, OWI researchers have responded with vast and diverse research studies and articles that recently were collected to form the *Bedford Bibliography of Research in Online Writing Instruction* (2017). Nonetheless, despite the research advances that these publications

represent, online literacy educators still do not know much about student needs from the student point of view. With most of the research engaging instructional perspectives, students' stated needs regarding their experiences in online writing courses (OWCs) remain woefully underexplored; exceptions include research published by Patricia Webb Boyd (2008), Beth Brunk-Chavez and Shawn J. Miller (2006), Jennifer M. Cunningham (2015), Angela Eaton (2005, 2013), and Scott Warnock (2018). This report of a national survey of OWI students is the result of the OWI Committee's attempt to address this gap in published literature.

### **Background of the OWI Student Survey's Construction**

In 2014, the OWI Committee conducted an informal OWI-focused literature review, which indicated that no published reports existed of any national surveys dedicated to learning about students' experiences in OWI. To address this gap in OWI research, in 2015, the OWI Committee tasked a student-survey working group to develop a U.S.-based national online survey for students in OWCs.<sup>1</sup>

The student-survey working group settled on a survey designed to gather quantitative data primarily, using only a few subjective, open-ended questions. The working group decided to keep the survey as short as possible to encourage students to complete it fully, given research that suggests long surveys may be abandoned by respondents (Chudoba, n.d.). Given the ultimate intention of obtaining a generalizable sample of U.S. OWI students, the student-survey working group sought as large and as representative a student sample as possible.

The pilot student survey focused on student experiences regarding preparation for, access to, and learning in OWCs. Reading and alphabetic writing are minimal, core components to succeeding in online courses, and the working group was especially interested in learning directly from students what pedagogical components of OWCs they considered helpful in improving their writing. Development of the survey was guided by the following research questions:

1. How are students prepared for, or oriented to, their online writing courses specifically?
2. How do students typically access their online writing courses?
3. What components of online writing classes do students find most helpful in improving their writing?

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<sup>1</sup>The authors of this article were members of this student-survey working group.

4. What components of online writing classes do students find least helpful in improving their writing?

Testing the survey as a pilot was critical to refining it for the broadest participant base. To ensure a strong survey instrument, the student-survey working group conducted a pilot of the survey in the fall of 2015 to test question construction and survey length. Its first iteration was piloted with students taking classes from online instructors associated either directly or indirectly with the OWI Committee. When the OWI Committee reported its general results at the CCCC conference in 2016, the audience responses revealed ways to refine the instrument to engage student voices more fully about their OWI experiences. During that same conference, the OWI Committee received word that it had not been reconstituted; despite this unexpected news, the student-survey working group was committed to continuing the work begun with the pilot survey. They subsequently partnered with Macmillan Learning and the newly constituted Global Society of Online Literacy Educators (GSOLE),<sup>2</sup> which stepped up as the sponsor of this work. A second iteration of the survey was created from the pilot survey's learned lessons, and the working group requested feedback from online technical writing students at Louisiana Tech University in June and July 2017. Further revisions were made to the survey based on the second pilot, and the national survey was distributed in September 2017.

Western Carolina University is the IRB of record for the survey. The survey was designed in SurveyGizmo by Macmillan Learning, and it was intended for students in only fully online—defined on the survey as “a class that is delivered solely online, meaning your class does not meet in a face-to-face setting. All work and class participation is online”—and hybrid writing courses—defined on the survey as “a class that is delivered online and sometimes meets in a face-to-face setting (maybe once a week, once a month, or once or twice semester).” Student responses were anonymous. The student-survey working group used both a convenience sample in that the survey was advertised on listservs and relevant social media and a purposeful sample garnered from specific lists of online writing instructors that Macmillan

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<sup>2</sup> GSOLE was founded on the premise that all online courses, and particularly OWCs, engage literacy. Minimally, online literacy involves reading, alphabetic writing, and multimodal composition skills in digital settings. As Beth L. Hewett (2015) indicated, these three components are necessary in any online class. Minimally, all coursework requires online teachers to write clear instructional text—developed with the online setting in mind—and for students to read and compose from such text, making reading an especially important skill. From the most basic course information (course descriptions, syllabi, and assignments, as well as feedback) to lengthier and more complex required course readings, students must (re)learn and engage sophisticated reading skills to do their best work in online settings (Hewett, 2015). Additionally, in contemporary online courses, students are learning and using both traditional alphabetic writing as well as multimodal composition because these are core literacies for writing in postsecondary education and—more globally—for workplace communication and documents.

Learning made available. The survey was distributed during the week of September 18, 2017 and remained open until December 31, 2017; three reminder emails were sent during that time. Since the student-survey working group did not have access to students, the recruitment process involved two layers of participant requests in that the working group asked instructors who were teaching online to ask their students to complete the survey. There is no exact count of how many people received the email, and there is no way to know who distributed the survey link to students, so calculating a rate of return is impossible. Data were collected and stored in a SurveyGizmo account owned by Macmillan Learning and monitored by IRB-approved members of the survey group.

### **Limitations of the Survey**

Survey creation is a rhetorical act that must consider and balance the research questions with the audience and the selected research method (Rife, 2013). This important aspect of survey development is both a strength and a limitation. Thus, no survey will provide comprehensive data on any subject. This OWI student survey is no different.

One limitation of surveys is that they rely on self-reported data, which can be incomplete and unreliable (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). Those who complete surveys tend to self-select into a study for a variety of reasons that typically bias their responses. In the case of student-respondent data, even when they are assured that the instructor has no access to the responses, students may have believed they were required to complete the survey or that they had to do so using positive responses, which is a version of context effect (Lavrakas, 2008). Some of the data about pedagogical approaches can be interpreted in several ways, particularly when read against other research in OWI (see, for example, Anson & Anson (2017) regarding results from student responses to discussion boards). Even with the potential self-reporting dilemma, surveys remain a valuable method for acquiring responses from wide, diverse populations (Murphy, 2002).

The data in this survey were limited because they were garnered primarily from students at four-year institutions. There also was a recruitment bias to TPC, which likely means there would be differences in responses from first-year writing students; we surmise that TPC students would have different expectations of their OWCs than those of students in a required first-year writing course that happened to be an OWC. Further, no statistical comparison was made between responses from students in hybrid versus fully online courses. The two terms were defined on the survey, and students were asked to select which course they were enrolled in when asked to conduct the survey; however, hybrid courses vary greatly in their delivery, which



was not delineated on the survey, so all the data were combined for a more holistic picture. With a larger sample size of hybrid course students and more information about the delivery of such courses, additional research might use this survey's data as a comparison point.

Finally, and most importantly, we know little about the instructors teaching the course; instructor personality, ways of requesting survey participation, online teaching style, training and background, and numerous other factors all can impact the student experience, including participation and responses to the survey. However, as with studying instructors' perceptions devoid of student experiences, there is research value in gathering and analyzing only the students' experiences. Such responses also illuminate OWI pedagogy.

### **Pertinent Details about the Survey Data**

The final survey had approximately 25 questions (fewer depending on how respondents answered several skip-logic questions); 18 were multiple choice, 2 were frequency rankings, and 1 was a Likert scale question on pedagogical activities. There were four open-ended questions. As part of their sponsorship of this research project, GSOLE agreed to house the full dataset from this survey, which can be accessed by the public. Table 1 shows the breakdown of respondents.

Table 1. Breakdown of Total Survey Respondents

Total responses	569
Total responses after eliminating disqualified respondents and those who chose not to consent to taking the survey	487
Total who completed the survey	346
Total partial responses	141
Students selecting class option as "hybrid"	94
Students selecting class option as "fully online"	367

The student-survey working group chose to include all responses in the analysis, even partially completed surveys, because they had value for a grounded, initial understanding of student perspectives about OWI. In this written report, responses include *n* numbers as well as percentages to qualify the offset of completed and partial surveys; however, using all the data

prohibited us from making more advanced statistical comparisons, which typically can be done only by comparing variables from complete data sets.

The complete survey responses are weighted to TPC with 67% ( $n=231$ ). This result is likely because of the recruitment strategies used. The student-survey working group had access to a list of individual instructors who primarily taught TPC courses, and survey research indicates that response rates typically are higher when the request for participation comes directly to a personal email rather than from other sources (Lindemann, 2018).

### Demographic and Course Data

To better frame the results and discussion of this survey in subsequent sections, we first provide some demographic information of students who participated in the survey. Demographic questions appeared in the final quarter of the survey itself. Questions that asked students about the course they were enrolled in appeared in the first part of the survey, and they are included in this section.

#### Age.

**Question 20** asked, "Please identify your age range." Results appear in Table 2.

Table 2. Age of Student Respondents ( $n=346$ )

Age	% of Respondents
18-24	59% ( $n=205$ )
25-34	19% ( $n=67$ )
35-44	10% ( $n=36$ )
45-54	5% ( $n=18$ )
55-64	3% ( $n=12$ )
65+	1% ( $n=4$ )
Do Not Wish to Answer	1% ( $n=4$ )

A little over half of respondents, 59%, were traditional-age students, which typically are defined as 24-years old or younger (U. S. Department of Education, n.d.). The remainder, 41%, were (as defined in higher education) non-traditional students. The age distribution in this survey was much more traditional than the typical distribution of online-only students where the mean age of undergraduate online students is 29 (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016), possibly indicating that the traditional-aged students who took the survey were taking a single online course as a part

of a traditional on-campus degree. The high number of students over age 24 supports the notion that online learning is a valuable resource for students with complex family lives who need the flexibility of online courses (e.g., Gos, 2015; Noel-Levitz, 2015; Ruffalo Noel-Levitz, 2016). Age data specific to OWI can help faculty and administrators plan and market courses accordingly.

### Gender.

**Question 21**, asked “What is your gender?” Figure 1 summarizes those results.

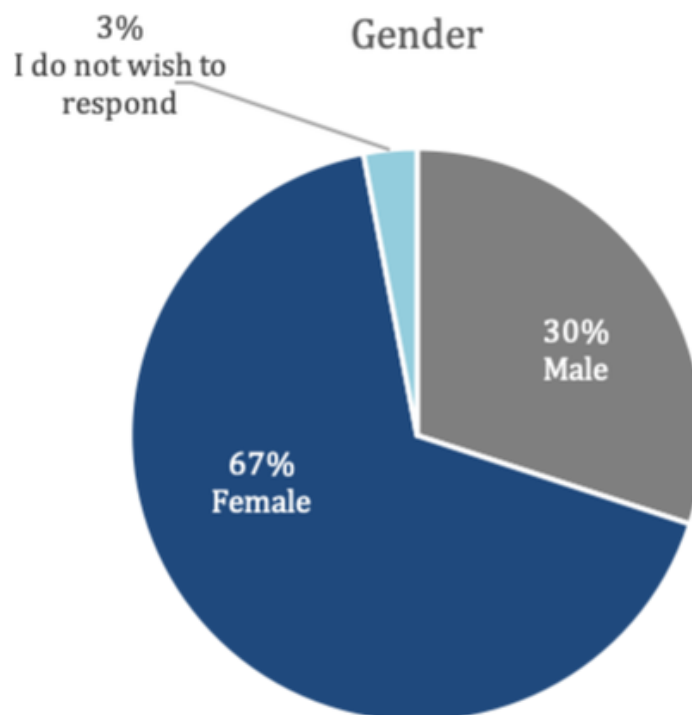


Figure 1. Gender of Respondents (n=341; Female n=228; Male n=104; I do not wish to respond n=9)

Although Figure 1 shows responses of “male,” “female,” and “I do not wish to respond,” the survey did include the option of “I identify as” with an open comment to allow participants to signify how they would like to be identified. This comment box did not generate any usable answers.

The gender breakdown of this survey matches national trends wherein women students are more prevalent in higher education (56% female) (U. S. Department of Education, 2018); additionally, it matches the increase in women students who take fully online and hybrid online

courses (approximately 70%) potentially because of family or work obligations (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2016).

### Academic level and type of institution.

**Question 22** asked, “I am a [fill in academic level] at a [fill in type of institution].” Students could select from a dropdown menu for the fill-in-the-blank options. Part one included freshman-to-senior options paired with the typical year students would be in school (e.g., freshman/first year), graduate, non-degree seeking, and “other” options. Part two included options for two-year, four-year, and “other.” Figure 2 shows results for academic level reported.

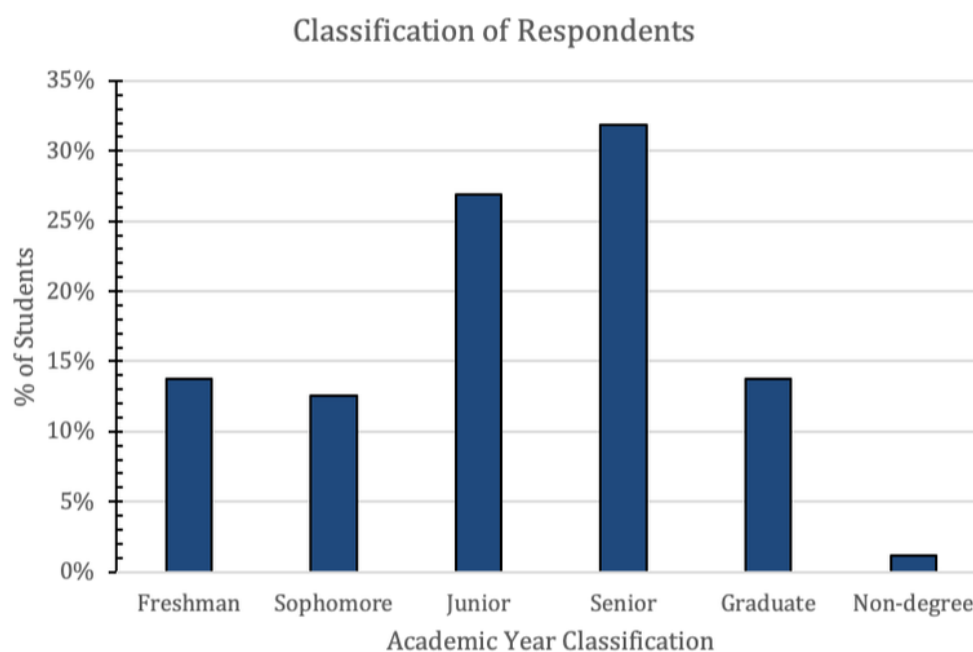


Figure 2. Classification of Respondents (n=342; Freshman n=47; Sophomore n=43; Junior n=92; Senior n=109; Graduate student n=47; Non-degree seeking n=4)

Only 2% (n=7) of the students reported attending a two-year college; the remaining 98% reported attending a four-year college or university. These results likely reflect the survey distribution more than typical online student-to-institution ratios since recent research has suggested that 36% of students attend two-year colleges (Ginder, Elly-Reid, & Mann, 2017), and two-year colleges comprise 30% of online enrollments (U. S. Department of Education, 2018).

The distribution of student academic levels is not surprising based on the type of courses being taken by the participants as shown next.

### Type of course.

**Question 1** asked, "Please identify the writing class in which you were asked to take this survey." Students were provided a series of courses from which to choose, and there was an "other" option for writing in a course not listed. Table 3 presents the breakdown of courses identified.

Table 3. Courses Students Enrolled in at Time of Survey (n=413)

Type of Course	% of students
TPC Service Course	62% (n=256)
First Semester Composition Course	14% (n=56)
Developmental writing/English	11% (n=44)
Second Semester Composition Course	6% (n=21)
Literature Course	2% (n=8)
Other (Write In)	2% (n=7)
TPC (Grant Writing)	1% (n=6)
Online Writing Instruction	1% (n=5)
Intro to Research	1% (n=5)
TPC (Editing)	1% (n=4)

Aligning with the recruitment and distribution of the survey link, more students in TPC completed the survey with first-semester composition (taken broadly to be first-year writing courses) following. "Other" written-in responses included "expository writing," "analytical and research writing," "creative writing," and "master's level course."

### Length of course.

**Question 2** asked, "The duration of this course is" with options for students to choose from and an open comment box for participants to write-in other options. Results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Length of Course Responses (n=411)

# of weeks	Student Responses
4 or fewer weeks	1% (n=5)
5-9 weeks	9% (n=37)
10-12 weeks	12% (n=50)

13-16 weeks	78% (n=319)
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That over three quarters of respondents were in traditional 13-16-week semester courses aligns with the high percentage who reported they were in a four-year college or university.

### Previous online course experience.

**Question 25** asked, “How many additional online or hybrid courses—in any subject—have you taken since you began college?” Figure 3 displays the results.

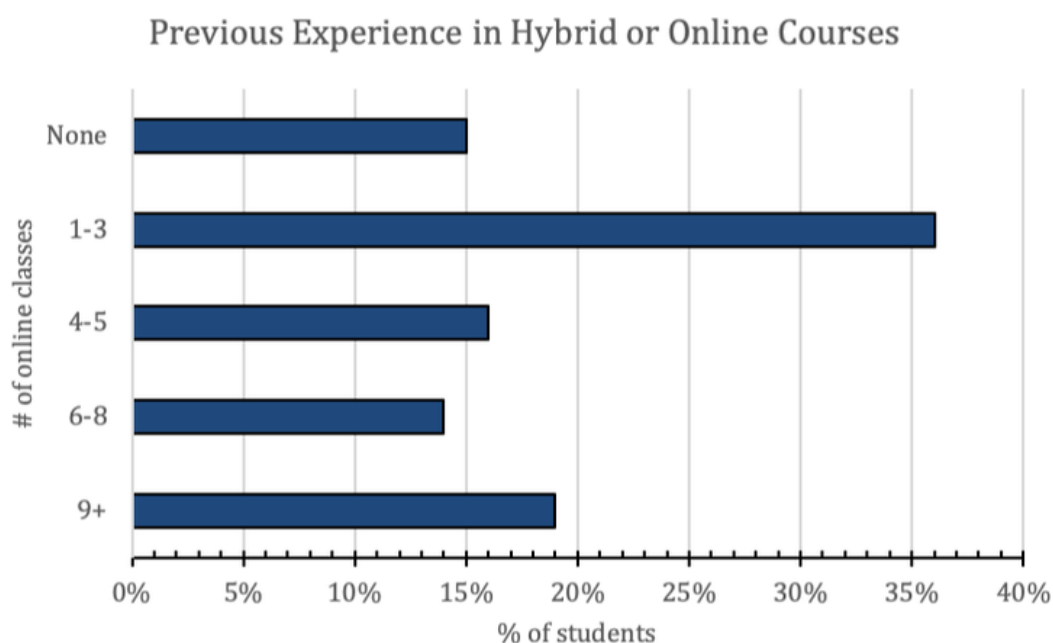


Figure 3. Previous Experience in Online or Hybrid Courses (n=338; 1-3 n=121; 4-5 n=55; 6-8 n=47; 9+ n=64; None n=51)

The general experience of students in online courses can be seen as a positive when thinking about OWCs. However, as discussed below, this experience may make it more difficult for students to adjust to the OWC that requires a different type of engagement than with other online courses such as math or basic science. Only 15% (n=51) had not taken an online course prior to their enrollment in the OWC, but this number suggests that care is necessary to ensure those students new to this learning environment are properly oriented to the setting as well as the particular class.

The next section expands on results from the rest of the survey.



## Results and Discussion

In this section, results of the three content-based sections—Course Information, Orientation, and Online Course Activities—are reported and discussed, leading to implications of this research at the end of this report.

### Course Information

Other than information reported on the courses in which students were enrolled (see Table 3) and duration of the courses (see Table 4), this part of the survey asked questions about the physical location where students completed their course work and what types of devices they used for accessing and completing their course work.

#### Location.

**Question 3** asked, “Please rank in order of frequency (with 1 being least frequent and 5 being most frequent) where you do the majority of your work for this online writing course.” Results are presented in Figure 4.

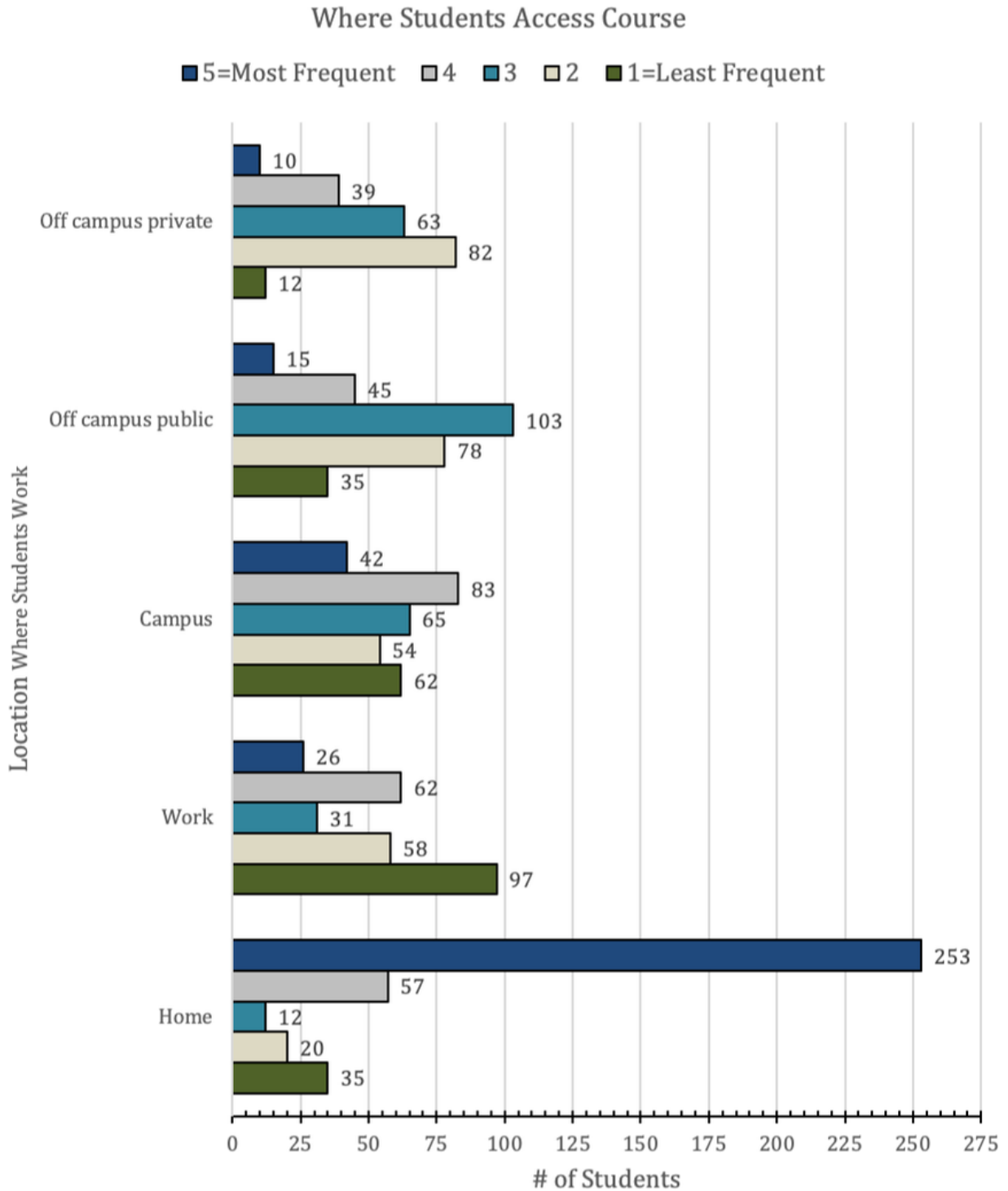


Figure 4. Where Students Access and Complete Course Work (Home n=377; Work n=274; Campus n=306; Off Campus Public Space n=276; Off Campus Private Space n=260)

As shown in Figure 4, the most frequent location in which students completed their school work was at home, followed by on campus; however, 274 students reported completing course work at their workplaces and, therefore, the conditions of such an environment and how it influences both the degree and frequency of engagement are important considerations. For example, when students access and complete their schoolwork at home or on campus, it would be reasonable to think they have a time and place set aside for such activity. Yet when they access and complete their schoolwork in the workplace, the question of whether the schoolwork is sandwiched between workplace tasks (or even completed instead of workplace tasks) arises. In such cases, it would be useful to learn at what kinds of workplaces students work and to what degree they can focus completely on their schoolwork. Certainly, an entire survey regarding location of access and completion of online coursework would be illuminating.

#### **Device used to access and complete course work.**

**Question 4** asked, "Please rank in order of frequency (with 1 being least frequent and 5 being most frequent) what kind of device you use to do the work for this online writing course." See Figure 5 for the results.

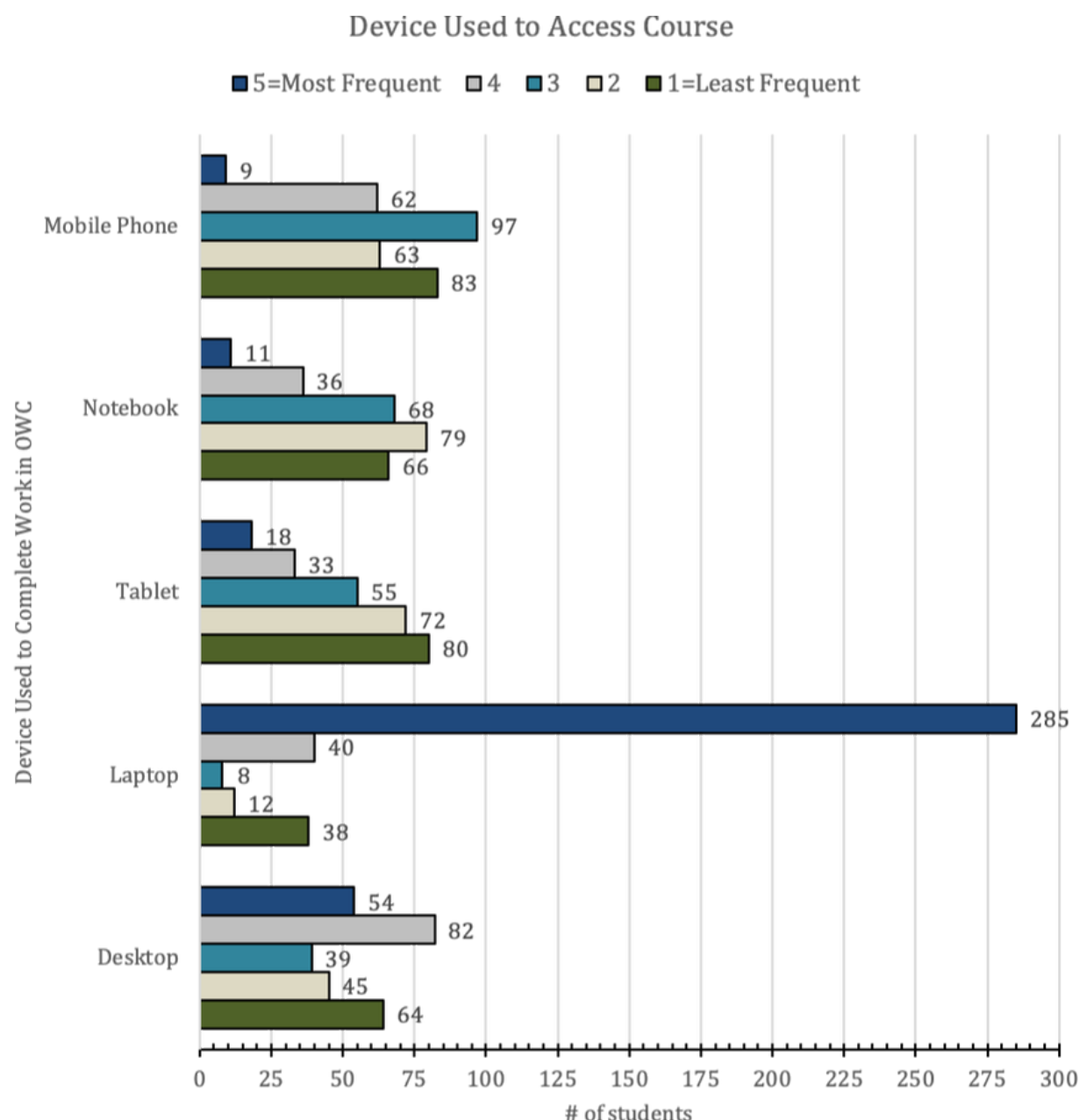


Figure 5. Device Used to Access OWC (Desktop n=284; Laptop n=383; Tablet n=258; Notebook n=260; Mobile Phone n=314)

A majority of students reported using a laptop to access their OWCs; however, use of a mobile phone exceeded use of desktops, tablets, and notebooks, suggesting that the size of the device mattered less than either the convenience factor or the possibility that a mobile device was the only connection the student had with the internet. The Pew Internet Project (2013) reported that 73% of Advanced Placement and National Writing Project teachers surveyed said that their students used mobile phones inside and outside of the classroom to complete their

school work. Some high school students from that Pew survey were college students at the time of this survey, suggesting that they would have access to and experience using mobile devices in classrooms. In 2018, over 94% of traditional college-age students (18-29) owned a smartphone (Pew Research Center), and Esteban Vazquez-Cano (2014) reported “[m]obile learning often takes place outside a formal learning environment, tending to become personalized via users’ personal mobile devices” (p. 1508). One implication of these data is that students may be using technology that is not conducive for the kind of work they are assigned in OWCs, so they may need technological guidance, which is addressed in the next section.

### Mobile application.

**Question 13**, asked “Does your institution provide a mobile application (e.g., Blackboard Mobile Learn) that supports accessing (getting into or working in) this course?” Results are shown in Figure 6.

Mobile App Available?

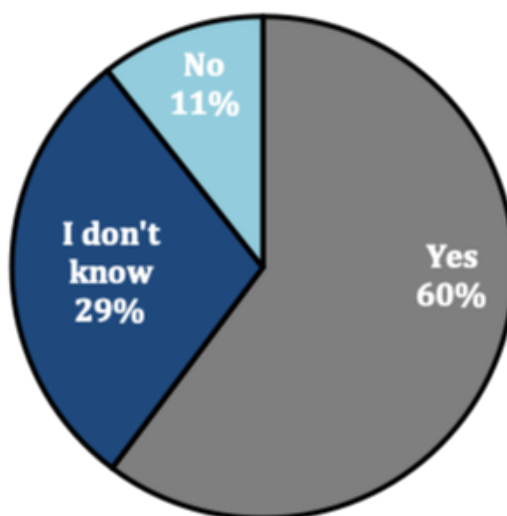


Figure 6. Is Mobile App Available (n=395; Yes n=238; No n=42; I don't know n=115)

For students who responded “yes” to Question 13, **Question 14** asked, “Please describe how you use the mobile application in this online writing course (check all that apply).” Results are shown in Figure 7.

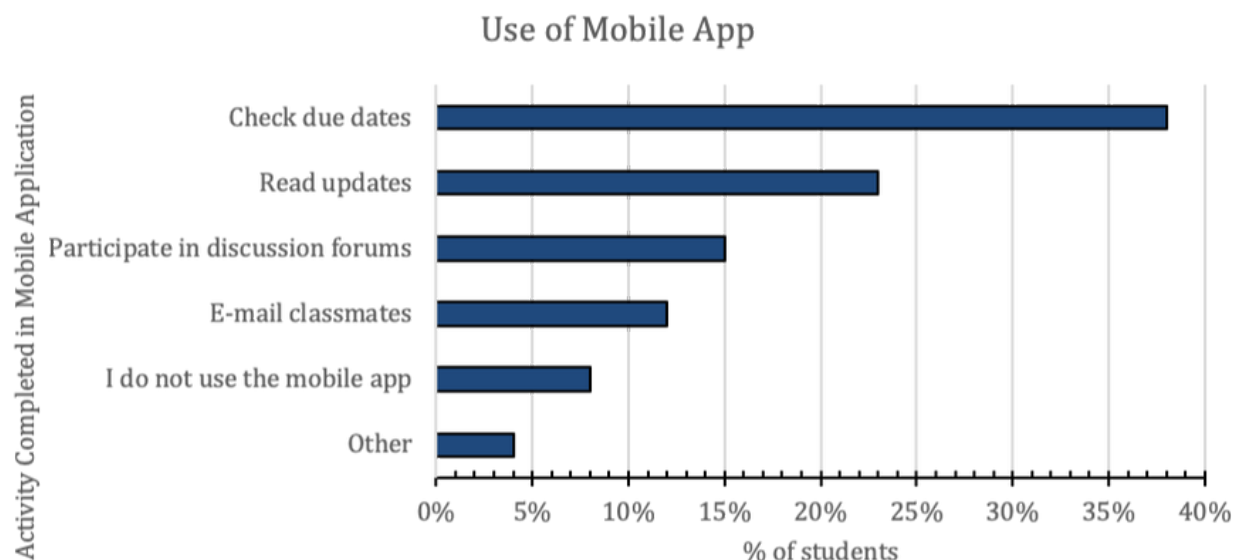


Figure 7. Course Activities Completed in Mobile Application (n= 667, students could select more than one response; Due dates n=256; Read updates n=155; Participate in discussion n=102; E-mail n=81; I do not use n=52; Other n=21)

The type of device students use to access and work in a course may be influenced by pathways into a course and how easy it is to use the course software on any given device; thus, some universities (e.g., Oregon State University, Colorado State University, and University of Southern California) now have mobile applications available for students to access online courses (Friedman, 2017). Most students who reported that their institution had a mobile app, 60% (n=238), also reported completing two to three activities using it (see Figure 7). It is worth noting that 13% (n=52) students reported not using the app even if it was available, suggesting a need to learn why they made this choice.

Students who preferred to use mobile devices to check-in—for example, with an online group or to ensure they are not missing an announcement—reported doing so for quick activities such as verifying due dates, reading messages, or accessing voice-threads. “Other” responses in the student survey of OWI included completing assignments and quizzes and checking grades. These activities are indeed quick undertakings that both are practical and supported through a mobile device. In a national survey of over 1500 online students, Dian Schaffhauser (2018) reported that 67% completed their coursework on a mobile device. The most common activities from that survey, which provided no information about the types of courses, included accessing course readings (51%), communication with professors (51%), and communicating with fellow students (44%) (Schaffhauser, 2018). The findings from that national survey align

with the findings from the OWI student survey and provides additional support for understanding ways that students are integrating mobile devices as part of their online learning and how instructors can support mobile technology in OWCs. However, it does not suggest how many students may be attempting to complete their writing assignments via mobile devices.

Additionally, Rochelle Rodrigo (2015) reviewed studies associated with using mobile devices in higher education and discussed mobile apps specifically in terms of OWI and the OWI Principles. She emphasized that it is impossible for any online instructor to be familiar with all devices available for students to complete their work; yet, given that OWI Principles 2 and 10 address institutional responsibility for supporting students' technology (CCCC OWI Committee, 2013), online writing instructors can provide "reasonable support." Reasonable support can manifest through instructors being "reasonably aware of some of the major issues that might occur when their OWC interacts with popular mobile devices and operating systems" (Rodrigo, 2015, p. 501), such as incorporating "low-stakes learn-the-technology assignments where students safely can explore how they will interact in a specific course with their individual devices" (p. 504). Implications of this survey's data indicating how students use their mobile apps minimally offers online writing instructors a glimpse into how to guide students as to what extent their mobile devices might work for some assignments and not for other work. Importantly, despite the useful voice-to-text functions of many mobile devices and their value for students who compose best orally, students likely should arrange to use other devices to complete their writing, such as when revising, editing, and formatting a final paper.

## **Orientation**

As a section, "Orientation" regarded how students had been prepared by their teachers or the institution for their OWCs.

**Question 5** asked, "Were you offered an orientation about taking an online writing class?" This question used skip logic so that students who responded "No" were advanced to the next section of the survey. Results for Question 5 are presented in Figure 8.



## Orientation

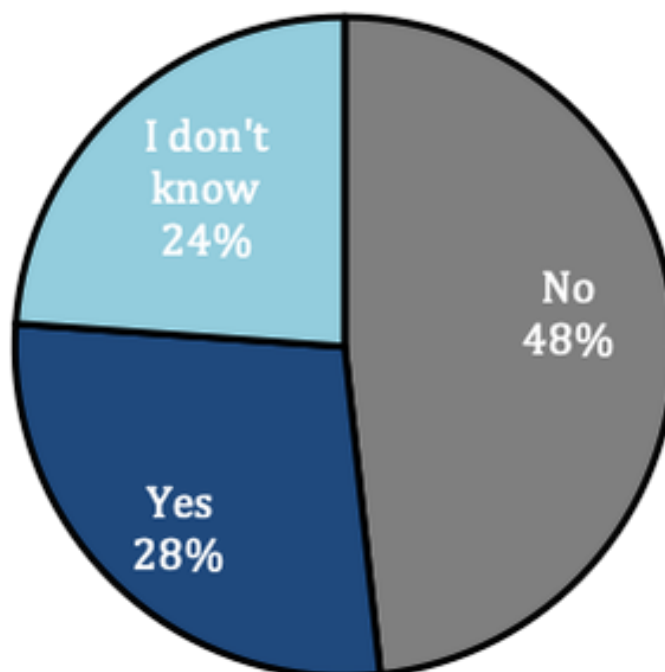


Figure 8. Responses for OWI Orientation (n=406; Yes n=113; No n=196; I don't know n=97)

Only 28% of respondents indicated they had received some sort of orientation to the OWC. Yet, once students enter the online learning platform, orienting them to the space is key to student success (Melonçon & Harris, 2015). Whether orientations take place at the institutional level (Bozarth et al., 2004), in face-to-face settings (Gos, 2015), or at the start of online courses (Dockter, 2016), instructors ideally should receive institutional support to help students adjust to online learning (Minter, 2015). Online orientations have been shown to increase retention in online classes (Taylor, Dunn, & Winn, 2015), and they can vary from a short tutorial video about the affordances of a single classroom to a multi-day on-ground orientation for students new to an online program (Lieberman, 2017).

Distinguishing between an orientation that specifically addresses OWI versus an orientation to online learning more generally is important. The survey question asked about an orientation specifically for an OWC; however, we do not know whether students identified the words “taking an online writing class” as central to the question or whether they simply responded to

being offered an orientation of any kind. This lack of clarity existed despite a follow-up question (**Question 8**, “Did this orientation adequately prepare you for the work in this course?”).

The failure of the survey question to be sufficiently specific aside, the 48% who responded “No” and the 24% who responded “I don’t know” indicate an alarming number without orientation to the OWC; the published literature strongly supports orienting online students to online classes in general (Lee & Choi, 2011) and to OWI in particular (Bozarth, Chapman, & LaMonica, 2004; CCCC OWI Committee, 2013; Gos, 2013; Melonçon & Harris, 2013; Minter, 2013). Additionally, because of the decision to keep the survey short, follow-up questions were not provided regarding actual participation in and components of offered orientations. Therefore, we do not know whether those students who reported having been offered an orientation actually participated in it and what they might have learned from it.

When developing the survey, the student-survey working group wondered whether previous experience in online courses affected whether students were offered an orientation in their current class. Although the question about being offered an orientation and the demographics question about the number of previous online courses students had taken (Figure 3) cannot be correlated statistically, we speculate that prior experience (or lack thereof) in taking online courses is one possible reason students may or may not participate in an orientation if one is offered.

**Question 6** asked, “Was the orientation delivered online?” Students could choose to check “online” (meaning “fully online”), “hybrid,” or “face-to-face.” According to OWI Principle 13, “OWI students should be provided support components through online/digital media as a primary resource” (CCCC OWI Committee, 2013, p. 25), which indicates that orientation for an OWC should be online in some fashion dependent on the type of course to be taken, and most respondents reported the orientation as having been fully online ( $n=102$ ), with only 8 students reporting “No,” and 5 students reporting it was a hybrid orientation.

Additionally, OWI Principle 10 states that “Students should be prepared by the institution and their teachers for the unique technological and pedagogical components of OWI” (CCCC OWI Committee, 2013, p. 21), which means students should be oriented not only for the technology they will encounter in the OWC, but they also should be given a course-specific orientation that includes interface familiarization, lessons, and examples of study habits and skills needed to succeed in an OWC (OWI Committee, 2013). Results from the survey were split for general

orientations to online courses, 51% ( $n=39$ ), compared to course-specific orientations, 49% ( $n=35$ ), which we further address below with an open-ended question.

**Question 8** asked, "Did this orientation adequately prepare you for the work in this course?" and the majority of students, 78%, ( $n=82$ ), responded positively. For those students who found the orientation helpful in preparing for the online course, the following responses exemplify why they found it helpful.

*The orientation helped give me a better understanding of what I should be prepared for during the semester.*

*The orientation allowed me to have a "heads-up" of things that could happen in an online course (good or bad) and where/how to seek help if problems arise.*

*The orientation clearly showed me how to navigate the class website and gain access to course material.*

*It was very clear that I had to have some basic computer skills, that I had to be self-motivated to check in, and showed me how the course was set up and how to get around in the course.*

*For those who responded "No" ( $n=23$ ), the following responses indicate that the orientations were too general to be helpful.*

*The orientation was too generic to be of any real assistance. Customizable course orientations would be more beneficial, and would also enable more uniformity in the way that online courses operate.*

*It was just general information on whether I would be able to keep up with the demands of an online course.*

*The video discussed how to use the interface, but it did not discuss how the professor would use the interface or layout the course (it is a pretty flexible interface from the professor side). It did not create a successful mental model of the course.*

The combination of responses indicate that students need—and want—an orientation that includes information about technology, general online learning pedagogy, and course-specific information. Orientation to the online environment and a specific online course are the first steps to ensuring student success (Lee & Choi, 2011). In the case of OWI, “course-specific” should include a range of information depending on the course, including how tools and activities within a course are designed to help students improve their writing as indicated in OWI Principle 10 (CCCC OWI Committee, 2013). We encourage writing program administrators to advocate for instructor funding and support in creating online orientations perhaps through university centers for teaching and learning or through offices of distance education.

### **Online Platform and Technical Difficulties**

As part of the Online Course Activities section, students were asked questions about their experiences with the learning management system (LMS) or other software programs used to deliver the OWC and technical difficulties in accessing the course.

#### **Online platform.**

**Question 9** asked, “In what program do you do most of your online work for this course?” Students were given four options for specific LMS programs, one “I don’t know” option, and one write-in option. In this survey, by far, Blackboard and Canvas were the two most common platforms reported being used to deliver OWCs: Blackboard at 38% ( $n=152$ ) and Canvas at 31% ( $n=123$ ). The other options of Moodle, Google, D2L, and “I don’t know” were less than 10% each. As one would expect, the types of tools used to deliver online courses are vast, and since the survey did not define exactly what was meant by “program,” respondents included a number of responses in the open comment box. Examples of “other” responses included “Zoom,” “Adobe Connect,” “a website,” “Google,” “Word,” and “Eli Review.”

According to Phil Hill (2017), Blackboard continues to be used in just over one-quarter of academic institutions (28%) representing 37% of all student enrollments in the U.S. and Canada. Canvas continues to gain market share, used in 21% of academic institutions representing 27% of student higher education enrollment. The next closest competitor, Moodle, is used at 25% of higher education institutions but represents only 12% of enrollments in the higher education market, indicating that it is used primarily at smaller institutions. Canvas continues to gain users, pulling market share primarily from Blackboard and D2L/Brightspace (edutechnica, 2018). Thus, the survey results are unsurprising when considered in the broader

context of national conversations about learning management systems and online course delivery.

### Technical difficulties.

**Question 10** asked, "Have you ever had technical difficulty accessing (getting into or working in) this course?" This question used skip logic, so those who did not experience technical difficulties were moved to the next section of the survey. Most students reported they did not have difficulty accessing their OWCs. However, for those students who reported difficulties, 28% ( $n=111$ ), a follow-up question asked what those difficulties were. Most responses indicated "system" problems in that students had problems accessing the LMS. Common access problems included "server was down," "system was down," "freezes," and "connectivity issues." Of the 28% students who reported problems accessing the course, they expressed they were using the devices identified in Figure 9.

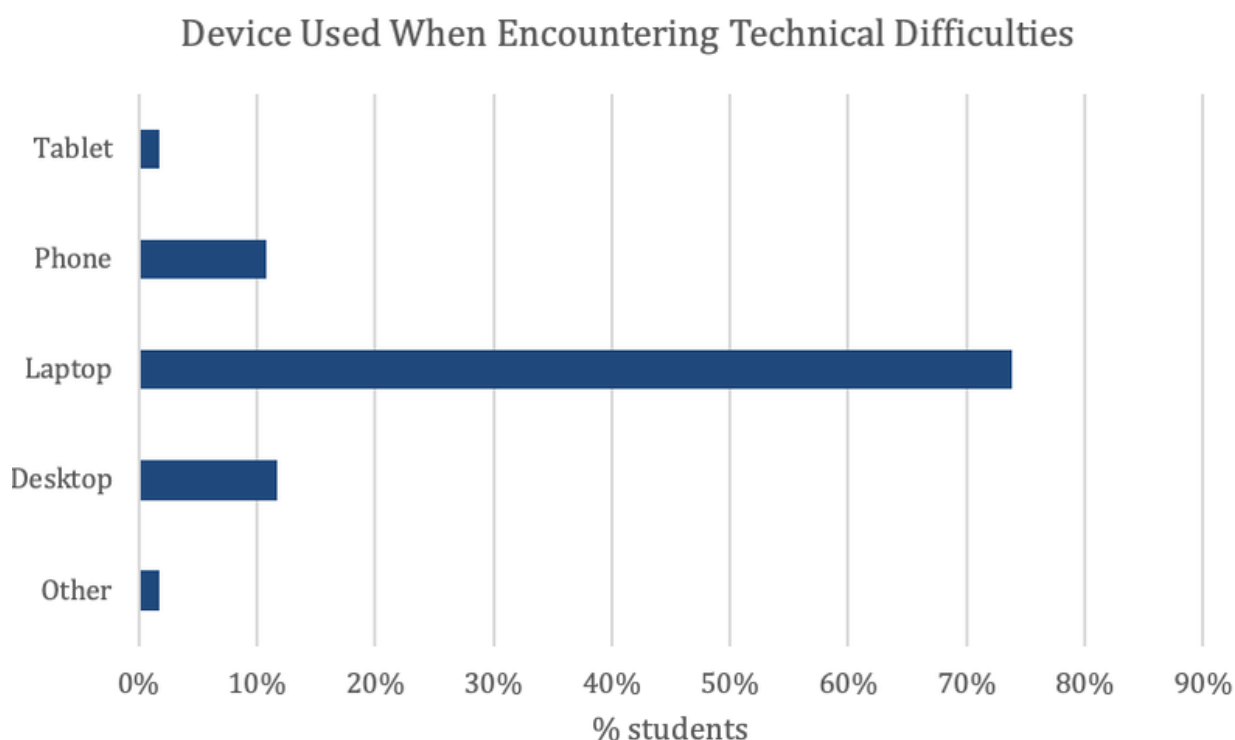


Figure 9. Device Used When Encountering Technical Difficulties ( $n=111$ ; Desktop  $n=13$ ; Laptop  $n=82$ ; Mobile phone  $n=12$ ; Tablet  $n=2$ ; Other  $n=2$ )

The reported devices in Figure 9 align with Figure 5 for the most commonly used devices by students to access and complete their online work in the Course Information section. Few students reported access problems stemming from how the course was set up within the LMS or other tools used to deliver the course. They further conveyed that if problems existed within

the course, instructors were responsive in resolving those issues. The following detailed response encapsulates the findings from technological access:

*When I first enrolled in the course, I could view the course but I was unable to create a thread in the discussion board. So I was unable to do the assignment for the week. I simply emailed my professor and a few days later I was able to create a thread. In the past, I have had difficulties with accessing online courses due to poor internet connection at home. Also when using the app on a mobile phone it is very difficult to write in the discussion board. The page jumps around, deletes or hides things you've written or doesn't allow you to fix mistakes.*

### **Effectiveness of Course Activities**

As part of the Online Course Activities section, the following discussion centers on three questions that asked students to rate course tools and activities commonly found in OWCs and then to explain their ratings. For an in-depth discussion of these pedagogical activities and a way to improve online course content, design, and deliver, see ["A Call for Purposeful Pedagogy-driven Course Design in OWI"](#) in this issue.

**Question 15** asked, "Please rate the effectiveness of the following activities in your current online writing course as they relate to you improving your writing ability or becoming a better writer. There are two rows to add activities that are not presented in the options. "In this question, using a 1-5 Likert scale, students were asked to rate the effectiveness of common tools and activities implemented in their OWCs as they related to improving their writing. Students could indicate whether the item was not incorporated in their current course, and a write-in option also was built in. The items in this question included:

- Discussion boards
- Quizzes and tests
- Synchronous chats
- Podcasts
- Videos
- PowerPoints
- Assigned readings
- Giving and receiving peer feedback
- Instructor feedback

**Question 16** followed, asking, "Considering your responses in Question 15, please identify what work in your current online writing course is the **most valuable or helpful** to you in

improving your writing and explain why.” **Question 17** asked, “Considering your responses in Question 15, please identify what work in your current online writing course is the **least valuable or helpful** to you in improving your writing and explain why.” Results in this section include both quantitative data from Question 15 (shown in Figures 10-17) and qualitative data from Questions 16 and 17.

### Discussion boards.

The quantitative data regarding discussion boards suggests that most students found this tool helpful in OWCs (see Figure 10).

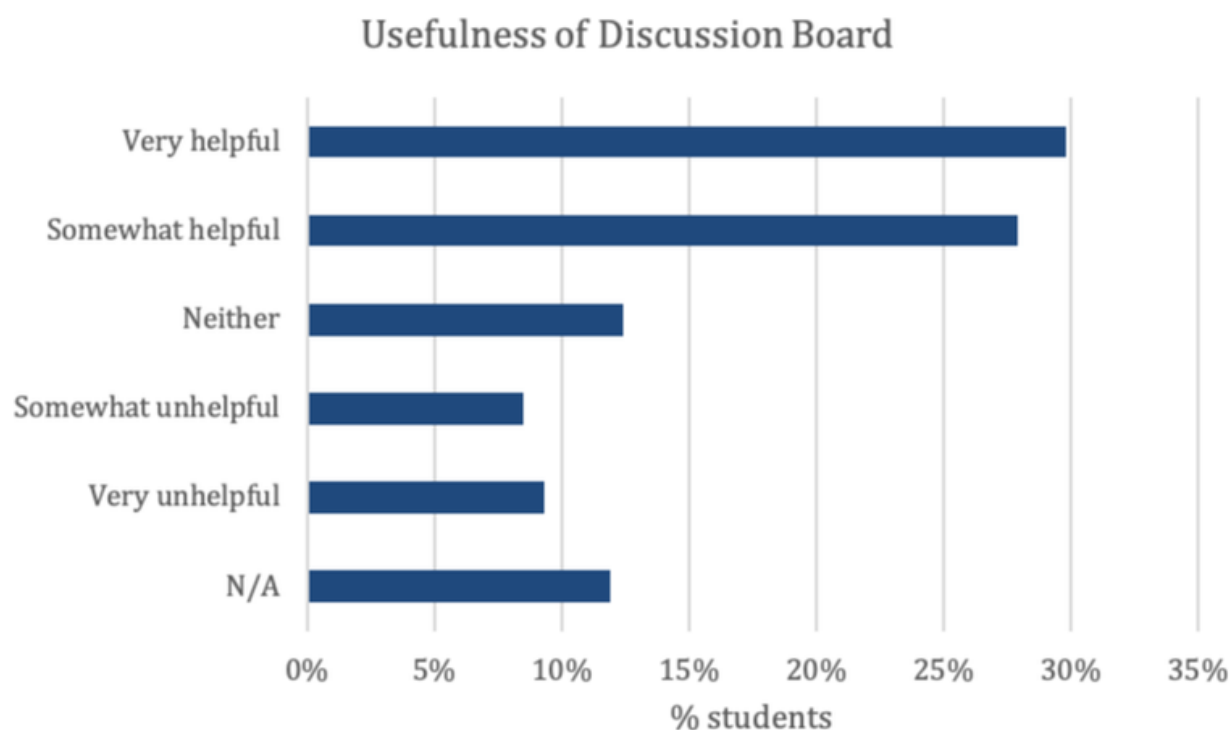


Figure 10. Usefulness of Discussion Boards in OWC (n=419; Very helpful n=125; Somewhat helpful n=117; Neither n=52; Somewhat unhelpful n=36; Very unhelpful n=39; N/A n=50)

When coupled with the open-ended responses, however, contrary results about discussion boards emerged. Although we are uncertain why such a discrepancy between the quantitative and qualitative data sets existed, by considering both data sets, we speculate a possible disconnect between students’ general perceptions of this learning tool versus their perceptions of—and familiarity with—asynchronous communication for specific uses in their OWCs.

Students who reported discussion boards as being useful generally commented on the benefit of receiving multiple perspectives on their writing.



*I find the discussion boards most valuable and helpful. There, we students can collaborate and gain different perspectives of assigned discussions.*

*The discussion board is the most useful because it is nice to have a place where we can communicate. It provides feedback and is similar to a face-to-face class.*

*The discussion board as well as instructor feedback on my writing. It helps me to better gauge the work that is expected of me and work out any smaller issues that I may have overlooked during my writing process. It helps extensively with content development.*

Students who remarked that discussion boards are among the least useful activities generally perceived participation in discussion as being “forced,” which they reported as resulting in thoughtless and meaningless responses and peer feedback. In his research, Michael Wilson et al. (2015) reported that students’ “trust in the ability of other students to mark their work was quite low” (p. 22), which appears to match some results of this survey based on open-ended comments. Specifically, students reported not understanding how discussion posts improved their writing, and they did not see how peer response—either through their responses to others or in others responding to them—improved their writing, as indicated in the comments below.

*Discussion boards can help generate new ideas but don’t necessarily help my writing, in my opinion.*

*Discussion posts. They seem to be used as “filler” points for the class. I have yet to complete a discussion post that brings value to the course.*

*Discussions. I feel like I don’t get much out of the peer reviews and discussions because the other students in the course don’t give me feedback I find helpful.*

*The discussion board is the least valuable because I feel people just are writing to complete it rather than having meaningful discussion.*

Only 43% of the respondents in a national survey of online students (Schaffhauser, 2018) found discussion board use helpful as class activities. This result is similar to our findings, and, in some ways, connect to data below on peer reviews wherein students may not have seen the value of individual student comments. Yet, per other studies, when they were guided toward self-reflection and self-assessment of their writing, they expressed that discussion board use

could help them improve their writing and learning (Nielsen, 2012; Papadopoulos, Lagkas, & Demetriadis, 2017). Student comments in this study also suggest that the use of discussion boards, while widespread, needs to be carefully considered—and explained pedagogically from a student-centered perspective—when designing OWCs.

### **Quizzes, tests, and assigned readings.**

Figures 11 and 12 display quantitative results for students' perceptions of helpfulness of quizzes, tests, and assigned reading. Students wrote comments concerning quizzes and tests that often were coupled with comments about assigned reading; therefore, we present these results together.

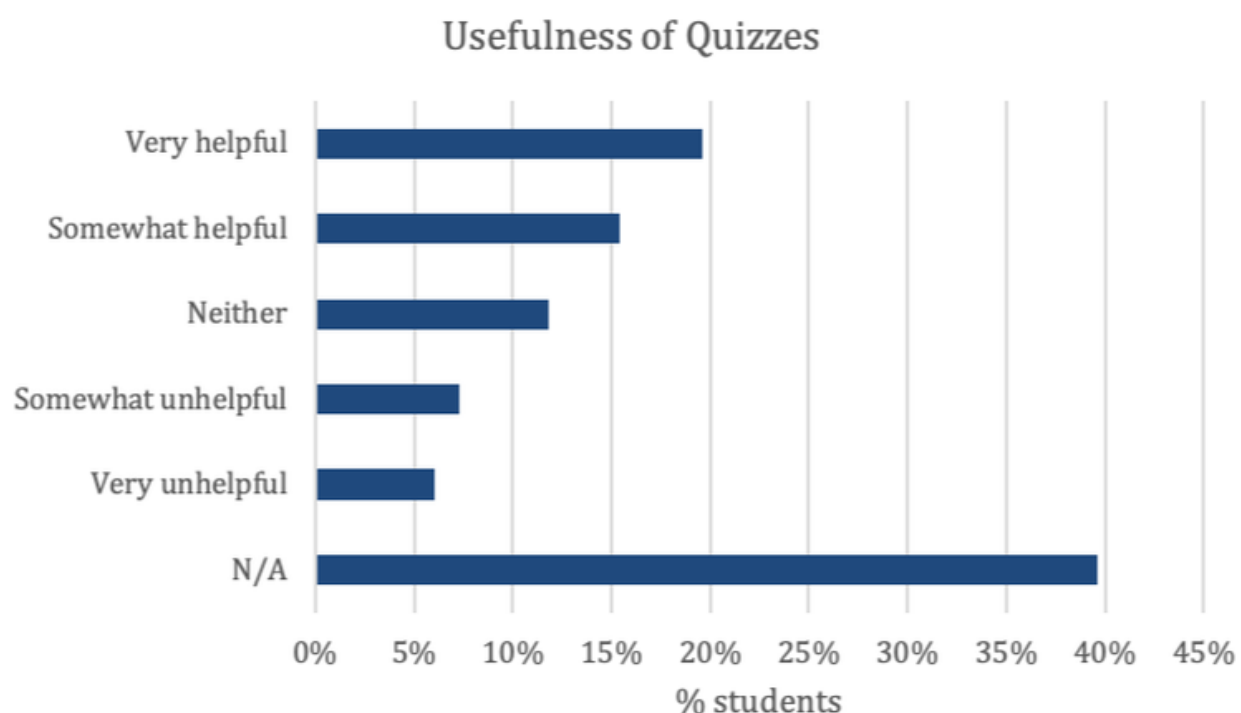


Figure 11. Usefulness of Quizzes (n= 396; Very helpful n=78; Somewhat helpful n=61; Neither n=47; Somewhat unhelpful n=29; Very unhelpful n=24; N/A n=157)

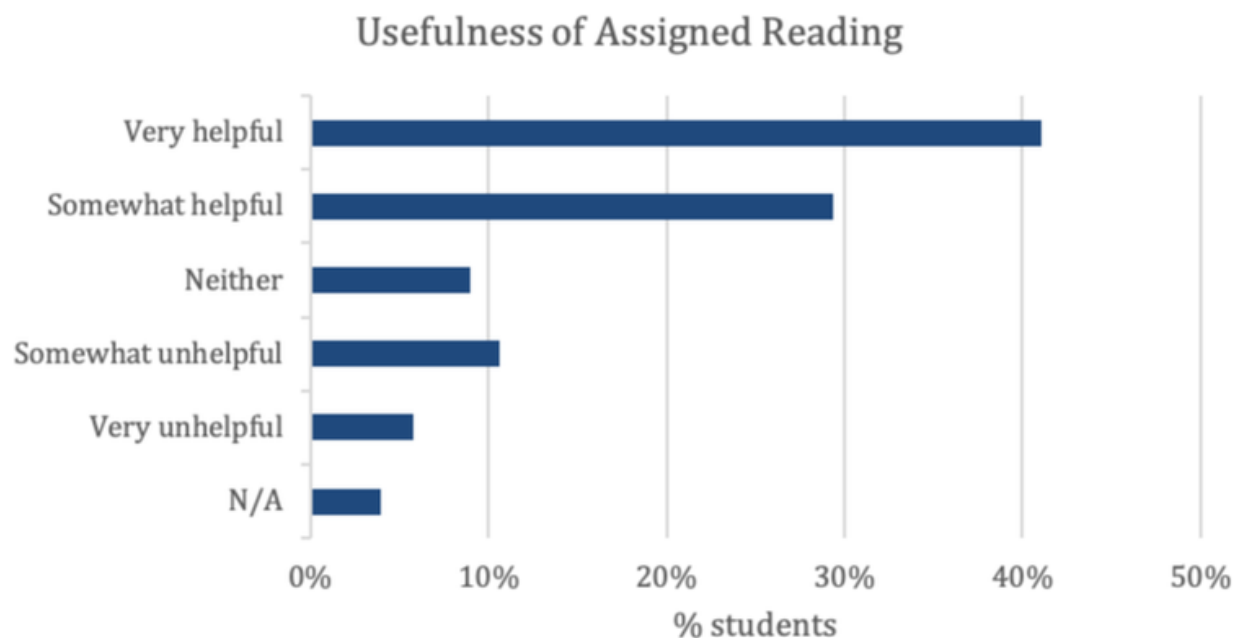


Figure 12. Usefulness of Assigned Reading (n=377; Very helpful n=155; Somewhat helpful n=111; Neither n=34; Somewhat unhelpful n=40; Very unhelpful n=22; N/A n=15)

Students reported that quizzes were generally assigned to test whether they had completed the reading, suggesting that they understood quizzes can be helpful in learning about their understanding of the readings (e.g., “The quizzes help focus on what’s important in the readings”), but some students commented that they did not know how reading about writing could improve their writing:

*Reading a textbook about writing is not helpful I think it takes more experience and practice to develop writing skills.*

*I think the course readings are somewhat hard to follow at times, especially since we can’t see an in-person demonstration or explanation of the material. There are times it feels like it would be quicker and easier to learn some of the book material in class, so we can learn from our peers and professor about our specific concerns right then and there in class.*

Some students reported readings as being most helpful. In the open-ended responses for Questions 16 and 17, some students simply listed the textbook as being effective with no other comments; others reported the textbook and readings to be beneficial for several reasons, such as those provided below.

*The text and assigned readings because they were geared to a specialized for of writing.*

*The course readings were the most valuable work assignments because I learned to look at writing differently which opened a door to new dimensions of writing. Writing became something I admired, not just a literacy requirement.*

One take-away from these data is that quizzes and readings can be seen as “added” assignments if they are not connected to the other assignments in an OWC. For example, Ingrid Spanjers et al. (2015) found that in hybrid environments, frequent quizzes help students “[space] their learning activities” (p. 72), which may positively affect them achieving learning objectives, and feedback on quizzes help students determine what is important. Additionally, Mary Margaret Kerr and Kristen Frese (2017) noted four reasons that students do not read, one being an underestimation about the importance of the reading. Thus, online writing instructors should explain to students how readings and quizzes connect with learning outcomes and other assignments in the course; additionally, instructors should provide feedback to help students realize the connections and importance of the reading, which is addressed in “A Call for Purposeful Pedagogy-Driven Course Design in OWI”.

### **Synchronous chats, podcasts, videos, and PowerPoint.**

Figures 13, 14, 15, and 16 display the results of student rankings of various multimedia teaching tools. Although typically considered at least somewhat helpful when instructors used them, students appeared not to have much experience with instructional synchronous chats, podcasts, videos, and PowerPoints as evidenced by the significant number of responses in the “N/A” category. Regarding OWI as a course that potentially teaches multimodal composition, these results are somewhat dismal. If instructors do not use multimedia (particularly in the TPC OWCs prevalent in the survey responses), it is highly unlikely that such skills are taught as part of the composing processes overall.

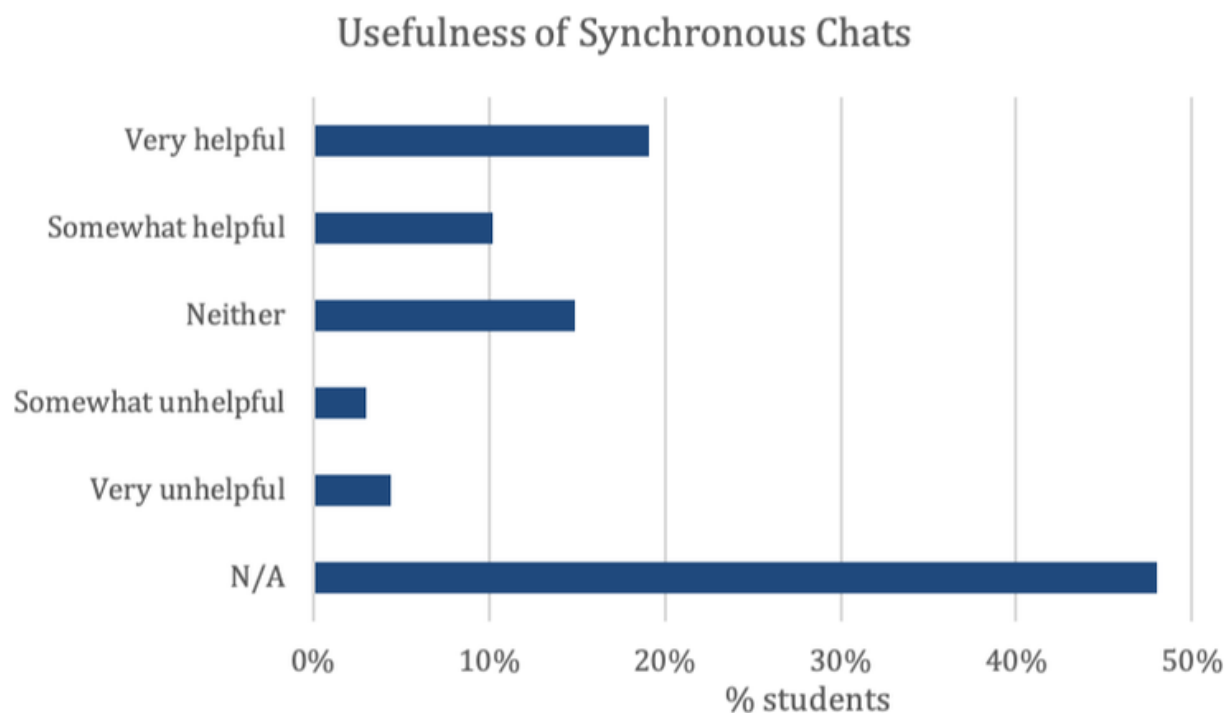


Figure 13. Usefulness of Synchronous Chats (n=383; Very helpful n=73; Somewhat helpful n=39; Neither n=57; Somewhat unhelpful n=13; Very unhelpful n=17; N/A n=184)

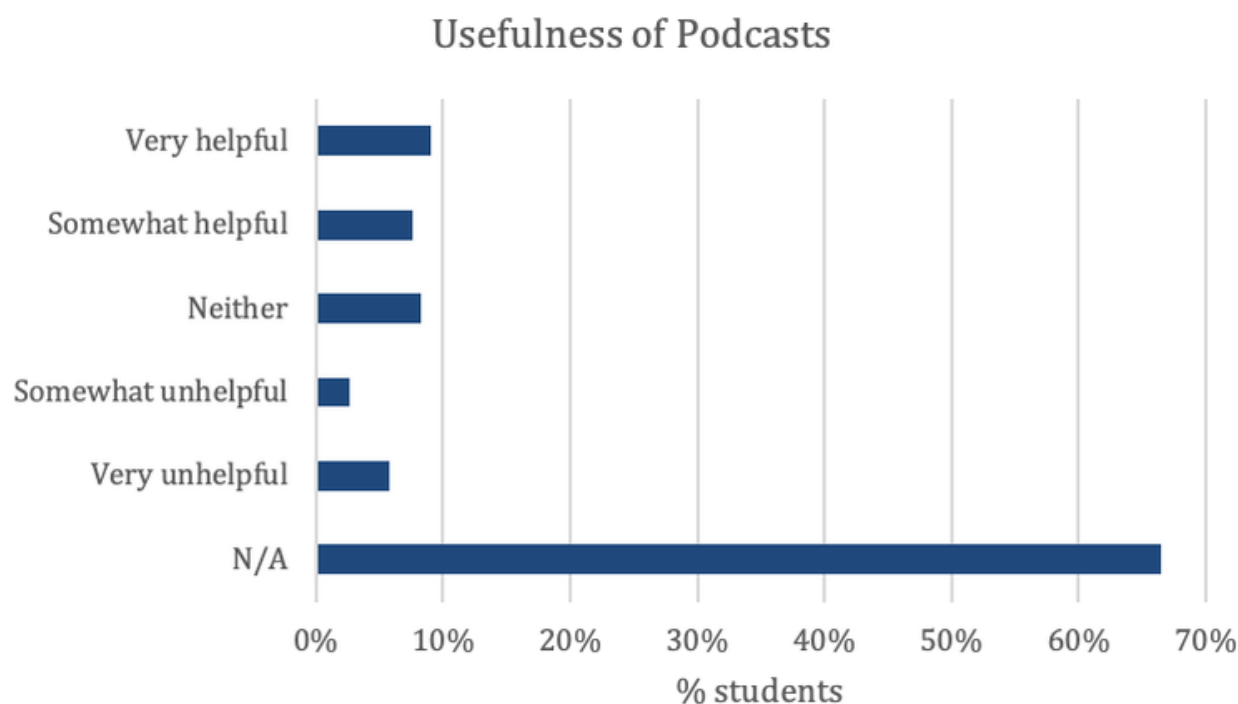
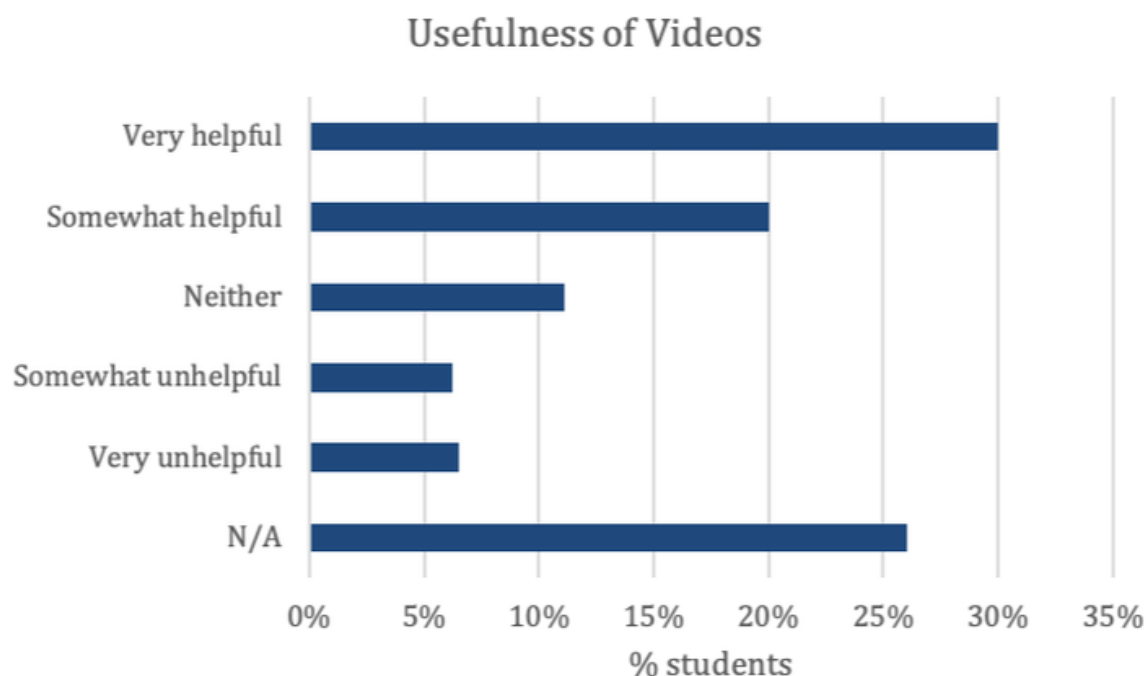


Figure 14. Usefulness of Podcasts (n=377; Very helpful n=34; Somewhat helpful n=29; Neither n=31; Somewhat unhelpful n=10; Very unhelpful n=22; N/A n=251)



Figure

15. Usefulness of Videos (n=369; Very helpful n=111; Somewhat helpful n=74; Neither n=41; Somewhat unhelpful n=23; Very unhelpful n=24; N/A n=96)

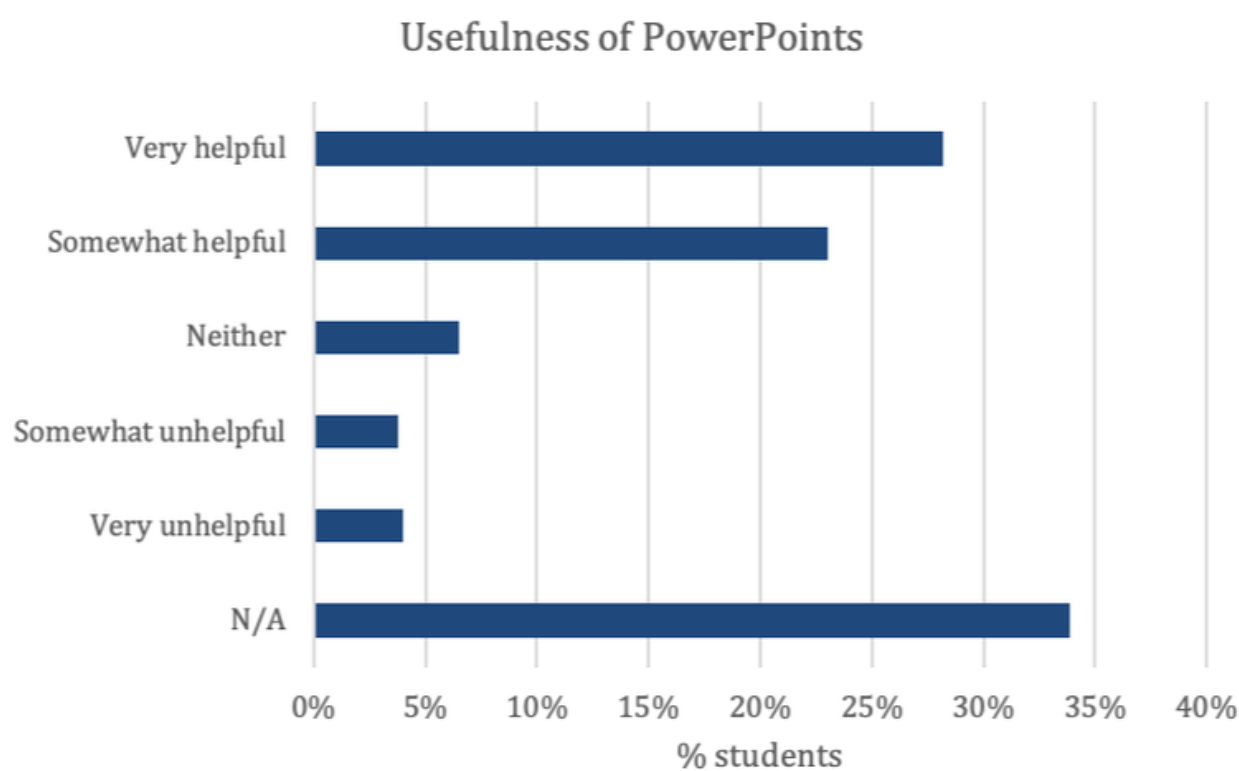


Figure 16: Usefulness of PowerPoints (n=368; Very helpful n=104; Somewhat helpful n=86; Neither n=24; Somewhat unhelpful n=14; Very unhelpful n=15; N/A n=125)

When evaluating how students responded to open-ended questions about helpfulness of multimedia in OWCs, we found that open-ended responses yielded more information than the numbers/percentages alone. In the open-ended responses, some students simply listed chats, podcasts, videos, or PowerPoints as being most or least helpful with no further explanation, but for those who gave explanations, the responses provide some reasons why students found these tools or activities helpful or not, such as how these activities or tools provided clarification about the course or their assignments.

*Real-time synchronous chats work best for me; if I have questions, I usually get an immediate answer, either from other students or the instructor.*

*the [video-recorded] lectures helped me most because while not face to face they were still more informative than me trying to read and figure it out myself.*

*i love the videos provided for the lecture. it's as though you are actually in the classroom. i love the feedback. i like the incorporation of google for like EVERYTHING in the class.*

*This is an editing class, so there is not as much writing, but we are learning the skills and grammar rules that strengthen my writing and professionalism. However, The PowerPoint slides we have used in class have been the most helpful.*

*Posting presentations and handouts in the discussion forum. We can access these to study for the midterm.*

PowerPoints and videos were remarked upon the most where students provided explanations for whether they thought creating such multimodal products as writing activities were helpful. As with reading, lack of context and knowing how to apply the information to their composition was a common complaint about videos and PowerPoint slides, as was the volume of these materials.

*I found the video responses to be the least helpful to my writing abilities. They were more focused on responding to social issues but I find writing out thoughts to be a more productive source of learning.*



*creating videos. this helps my speaking skills but not my writing skills.*

*Videos because I usually don't have the time to sit down and watch them. If I do, I am distracted and don't learn anything from them*

*Powerpoints. I don't read / watch them. You can't use a presentation medium to deliver information without a presenter.*

*The work that is the least valuable/helpful to me would have to be any PowerPoint/lecture slides. The course is primarily based off of videos and essays, so in terms of lectures, this is not specifically provided for the class.*

Technology is an integral part of OWI; however, as one can see from these responses, students were using multimedia to retrieve information to study from or to get answers to questions they had. Likewise, students expressed that they disliked multimedia in the classroom because they saw these activities as time consuming activities that simply deliver important or not-so-important information to them. They did not appear to see multimedia as composition devices, which begs the question whether instructors are using multimedia as delivery devices only or as compositional tools. As Scott Warnock (2015) mentioned, "Using audio/video is one way technology can enhance communications" (p. 158); thus, technology in the OWC can be used as a delivery system and as compositional aids that students should be taught to use in support of conveying the message they seek to express. GSOLE advocates that students learn this literacy skill as well as ways to read and write alphabetic text; the use of multimodal technologies should be connected with specific OWI pedagogy (Cargile Cook & Grant-Davie, 2005, 2013; Hewett, 2004-2005, 2006, 2010, 2011, 2015a, 2015b; Hewett & DePew, 2015; Hewett & Ehmann, 2004; Paull & Snart, 2016; Warnock, 2009), which may not be the case given the student feedback in this survey.

### **Instructor feedback and peer reviews.**

Figure 17 displays the quantitative responses to the helpfulness of instructor feedback and of peer review, whether it is getting or giving feedback.

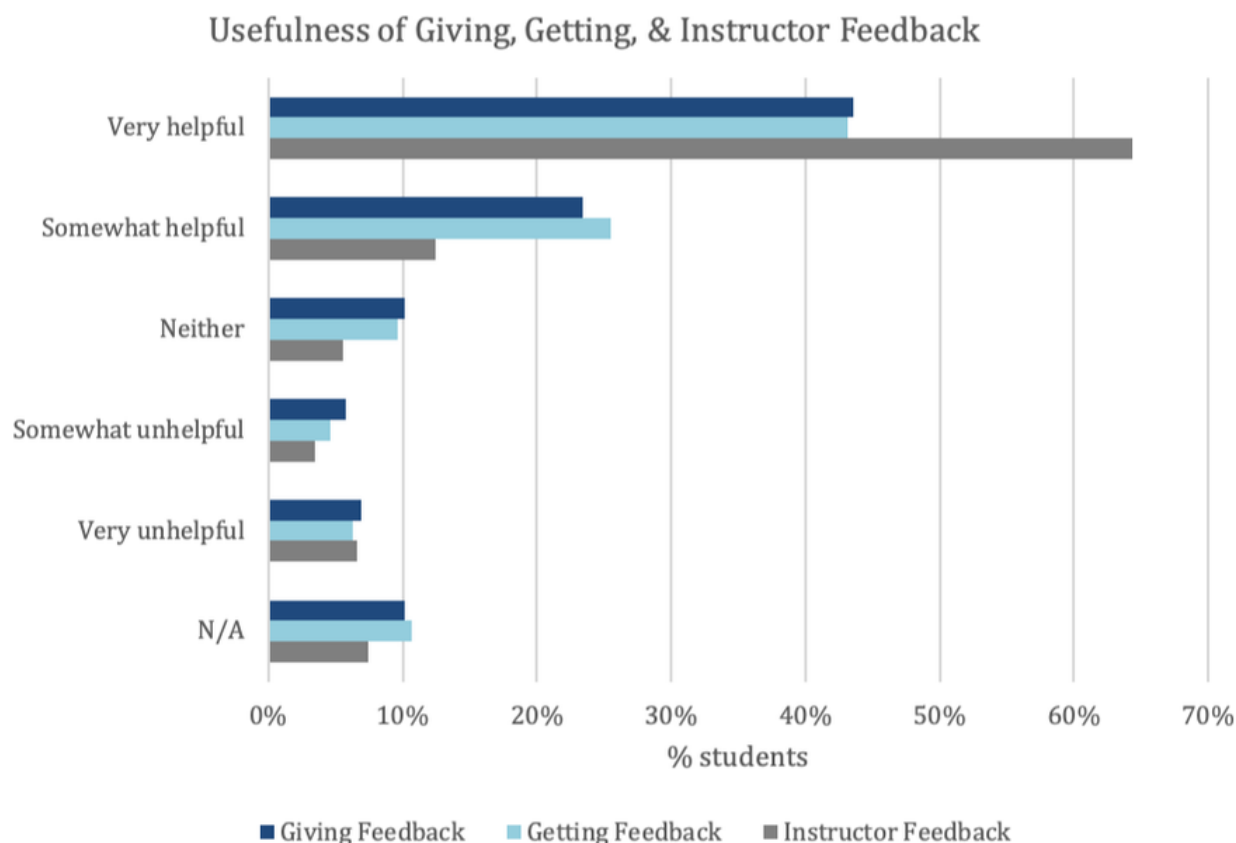


Figure 17. Usefulness of Instructor Feedback (Based on breakdown of Giving feedback n=376; Getting feedback n=364; Instructor feedback n=362)

Respondents overwhelmingly reported the most helpful type of feedback came from their instructor (Figure 17).

*In my opinion, instructor feedback is the most valuable or helpful. The instructor grades according to rubric and they explain why the paper may or may not have touched on all require information.*

*Instructor feedback- clarity in what I am doing wrong and if I am doing something right.*

*Direct comments on a written item from the professor. Its the most personal to me and can help me see my downfalls and where I need to improve. I think having students review work is positive, but value of reviews is often not that helpful for me personally.*

*Receiving instructor feedback is the most helpful in improving my writing, because sometimes students don't have all the information that my professor has that could help me.*

The responses concerning instructor feedback are noteworthy because they indicate that students value their instructors because of their expertise in writing, they value their instructor's feedback on their writing, and they want and need advice/directions from instructors regularly. Thus, student responses confirmed that instructor presence is a crucial aspect of successful OWI and can influence student participation, overall learning experiences (Richardson, Besser, Koehler, Lim, & Strait, 2016), and satisfaction in online courses (Ladyshevsky, 2013).

In terms of peer review, in this survey, 22% (n=68) of students reported peer review as helpful and 15% (n=33) did not find it helpful. Students who commented that peer reviews were helpful in the qualitative comments mentioned they had an audience other than the instructor that they wanted to impress. According to Arianne Rourke (2013), students reported that peer review of their work leads them to "feel less alone, more supported and more motivated to continue with the writing process" (p. 5). Additionally, they appreciated receiving different perspectives on their ideas and their writing as reflected in the comments below.

*I think the feedback is the most helpful because you get to see different opinions on it.*

*Definitely, feedback from my classmates. I was able to see what I was doing wrong or could improve on before submission to the teacher.*

*It was most helpful having feedback from peers and my teacher and being able to stay in constant communication because I was able to identify what needed work in my writing.*

*Peer reviews is hands down the most helpful asset in this course as it helps other students perfect their own work when critiquing others.*

A common thread in these comments is that students may be using peer reviews to assess their own writing. Kristen Nielsen (2012) reported that formative activities, such as peer review, can improve student writing achievement and learning; however, both Nielsen (2012) and Pantelis Papadopoulos et al. (2017) mentioned that such improvement may come from writers analyzing

their own work through their analysis of others' writing and not necessarily from the comments provided by their peers in the review, which could be one reason for the negative comments about peer review received on the survey, such as:

*If I had to pick one, I would say peer feedback, just because peers are usually not trained in written response. The way they frame their comments can sometimes come across as rude or they comment on areas that aren't that important, instead of areas that would be helpful.*

*I find that peer reviews tend to be the least valuable, because most students and simply participating for the credit rather than giving meaningful information to improve the documents.*

*Peer feedback. Sometimes peers don't give legitimate feedback or do not know what they are talking about.*

Thus, instructors may need to reconsider how peer review is commonly conducted in OWCs and what guidance students are given for giving—and receiving—peer reviews.

Comments regarding which activities students found to be least useful were not insignificant complaints. To characterize comments from this section of the survey generally, students did not recognize why they were doing the work they were assigned in their OWCs (which may, in fact, be a challenge for students in more traditional classrooms as well); they expressed uncertainty about the structure, content, and participation in a OWC; and they did not see how the assigned work related to improving their writing. Therefore, we must ask: Are the OWCs these students experienced strategically and pedagogically designed to help them become better writers? If not, what features of the OWCs could be improved and how? (A potential answer to this question is posited in "[A Call for Purposeful Pedagogy-Driven Course Design in OWI](#)." These questions are crucial points for administrators to address in conversations and professional development with faculty. Furthermore, it seems important to ask whether OWCs are designed by writing experts (the instructor), and whether instructors have access to the institutional support they need to provide quality OWI in this primarily digital setting. These issues are addressed in the implications section.

### **Other.**

The pedagogical activities question was followed by two open-ended response questions.

- **Question 16** asked, "Considering your responses in Question 15 [regarding effectiveness of tools], please identify what work in your current OWC is the **most valuable or helpful** to you in improving your writing and explain why."
- **Question 17** asked, "Considering your responses in Question 15 [regarding effectiveness of tools], please identify what work in your current OWC is the **least valuable or helpful** to you in improving your writing and explain why."

Many of the responses from these two questions were similar to the preceding open-ended questions where students were asked to clarify their comments in relation to the Likert-scaled questions, so the responses addressed some of the same issues which were raised previously.

**Question 18** asked, "What is **not included** in your online writing class that would benefit the learning experience for you in relation to improving your writing?" Student comments in response to this question shed light on pedagogical activities that administrators and faculty should consider since a few aspects of the course were repeated more than others. These included students asking for more visual resources (i.e., PowerPoints, podcasts, and synchronous chats). Specifically, students requested videos as a way to feel the "human" element of online courses (e.g., "more videos from the professor, the audio video is helpful to bring the human element into the digital classroom."). There also were several comments associated with desiring better directions and more context for assignments (e.g., "I want lectures on the topic. Stuff to put the reading or blog posts into context. We just have five major assignments and no real curricula in my course. The prof doesn't seem real because there's no teaching involved.").

The final content question of the survey, **Question 19**, asked, "Do you have any other comments, concerns, or suggestions about online writing courses that you feel we should know?" Student responses did not contain repeated elements as in the previous question. Because students had not been queried about the content of their OWCs, it was an interesting finding that learners addressed context for assignments, grading, and appreciation for their instructors.

**Context for the assignment:** *Concerned that my fellow classmates and I aren't given a lot of context for our writing assignments, and therefore we do not put in a lot of time and energy into them...why we're writing is not made clear, in other words. How is a literary analysis going to help me do my job?*

**Grading:** *Please don't make a class that is graded based on labor that is bell curved against the other students' labor. Please don't make a class that is without lectures and only uses blog posts to convey tiny snippets of learning. Please don't make a class where even if you do all the assignments perfectly, if someone commented more, it counts as more labor, so they get the higher grade when there's no set standard for a participation grade. If you guarantee people a B for doing all the assignments moderately okay, but don't actually let them know if their labor is higher than the rest of the class, or in the middle, they're gonna complain about how they don't actually know what their grade is. Thanks.*

**Grading:** *An online writing class should not be graded solely on participation, as that is a biased remark. I, for one, think about my papers for several hours over a span of days before I begin writing it, but I know some people that can crank out a solid paper in less than an hour. That being said, a writing course should be focused on content and correctness, rather than "effort".*

**Appreciation for organized instructors:** *I love the structure of this course! I love that my instructor sends out emails before the new week begins which tells us what we have in store for that particular week and when we have due dates coming up. I also love that we are given a checklist with what we have to do for each week, as well as additional links that help with that week's lesson. Organization really helps me in courses!*

**Appreciation for organized instructors:** *It is \*so\* helpful when the instructor is organized and has explicit expectations for every aspect of the class (when homework is due, what's the plan for the course, what readings are due and where a student can find them, where and how should a student submit homework, etc). Having clear expectations and directions takes a lot of stress off the student because they don't have to try to guess what the teacher wants.*

Additionally, some students used this space for self-reflection about their learning styles, such as that they preferred online learning or face-to-face classes and why they were taking online classes, such as schedule conflicts with campus-based courses. These included the following:

*Would prefer in person classes but they don't fit my schedule.*

*I don't like taking courses online because it doesn't allow for flowing and interesting discussion among classmates.*

*I took regular composition and found it much more useful. The classroom interaction, exercises, and feedback can't be replicated online.*

*The reason I attend online class from home rather than work (where I would prefer) is because Zoom, Slack, and Skype Groups are all blocked from my work by Internet policy. I received exemption for a while, but it has to be renewed every month.*

### **Implications**

This article presented the data of the survey with generalized findings and now includes a brief discussion regarding implications. The companion article ["A Call for Purposeful Pedagogy-Driven Course Design in OWI"](#) offers analytical discussion regarding the findings and a model for purposeful, pedagogy-driven course design.

Some of the most illuminating responses from the survey related to the tools and activities in OWCs that students found least helpful in helping them improve their writing and the importance of the role and presence of the instructor. Students disclosed their perceptions about pedagogical approaches and components of OWC design as they related to improving their own writing without, perhaps, being cognizant they were providing such information. When viewed comprehensively, student comments in this section revealed a disconnect between the intended pedagogical application (as we speculate based on the scholarly literature) and how the tools and activities were perceived—and used—by students regarding the improvement of their writing. It seems important to note students did not express that the tools and activities in OWCs were ineffective or unhelpful in and of themselves. Instead, they communicated that the tools and activities were not always implemented in ways that improve student writing, rendering them somewhat ineffective or unhelpful for these respondents.

These results strongly indicate that instructors should consider how their discussion board prompts are designed, how the prompts function to meet learning objectives, what kind of feedback (i.e., grammar, content, and/or organization, among others) the instructor has been providing (and how that feedback relates to improving each individual student's writing), and what kind of feedback students are expected to provide to each other. Sheri Williams, Amy Jaramillo, and John Carl Pesko (2015) argued that "if instructors make their expectations explicit regarding depth of posts and exploration/problem resolution and collaboration/reflection, students will come to value and use these processes to extend their thinking" (p. 62). How could Williams et al.'s perspective be brought to fruition in an OWC? Warnock (2009,



2018) expressed that discussion boards can be more useful when the instructor takes on a respectful yet critical persona that questions student assumptions and asks them to rethink their statements in an asynchronous discussion. Is this a skill limited to one educator or can all online writing instructors learn and implement it?

Furthermore, peer feedback arose as a meaningful concern for students. If peer feedback is expected to help students improve their own writing, how should it be taught as a skill (or measured as a competency)? The data made apparent that students valued instructors and instructors' expertise with writing; furthermore, the data visibly revealed that these student respondents preferred and desired instructor feedback to improve their writing. This point has important implications regarding the role of the instructor in an OWC because instructor feedback is crucial in supporting student confidence of their application of course material (Borup, West, & Thomas, 2015; Hewett, 2015b).

Finally, but not to be minimized, the data indicated that instructors should explain the rationale—and long-term learning impact—for their specific uses of readings, quiz assessments, and peer review in each OWC's context, as well as for the assignments themselves. By taking the time to include a pedagogical foundation for course activities, instructors may motivate students to more effectively attempt or complete tasks in an OWC; as a result, students may more substantially associate successful completion of an assignment with framed and scaffolded learning activities. (See "A Call for Purposeful Pedagogy-Driven Course Design in OWI").

This point also emerges in other data discussed below—students expressed that they did not know how the work in OWCs helped them improve their writing. Thus, one implication is that the potential to learn should not only be apparent to instructors and administrators in the form of course learning outcomes—it should be made apparent to students, and the orientation is one place to do so. In other words, the course design should ensure that course activities and course tools are actively and meaningfully contributing to successful completion of course assignments and that students can understand these connections throughout the course (Cargile Cook & Grant-Davie, 2005, 2013; Hewett, 2004-2005, 2006, 2010, 2011, 2015a, 2015b; Hewett & DePew, 2015; Hewett & Ehmann, 2004; Paull & Snart, 2016; Warnock, 2009).

## Future Studies

Data from students about their learning experiences in OWCs are vital to the future of OWI. As the first attempt to gather student perceptions on a national scale, the survey data raised additional questions key to future research. Acknowledging—and including—student perception and student voice in studies associated with OWI will improve faculty understanding of these issues from the learners’ perspectives.

Future studies should focus on and expand attention to additional aspects of student learning in OWCs beyond what was attempted in this survey. Especially important components of such study should specifically address the issue that access is multifaceted, including physical and cognitive abilities, language proficiency, and socioeconomic conditions. Beyond access, the nature of the modality in which the course is offered (i.e., whether it was asynchronous or synchronous and whether it was fully online or hybrid) needs to be raised to offer additional context for student responses; hybrid courses vary regarding inclusion of required (or optional) synchronous face-to-face and/or fully online sessions, which affect student experiences. Moreover, studies should address the physical location in which students access the LMS as it may impact experiences both in using course tools and in completing course activities. For example, students who accessed the course primarily from a work location may be completing course tasks within time restraints or in a hectic environment where course activities are consistently achieved, but disjunctively.

At this point in the development of OWI, more research is needed to better understand the student learning experience to comprehend what students envision they want and need in an OWC. This survey and its subsequent results are only the first steps in the necessary evolution of research from the students’ perspective. Researchers interested in further studying the approach taken by the student-survey working group have full [access to the survey and survey data](#) in hopes other researchers will advance and expand on the work presented here.

### Conclusion

This survey was deliberately developed to understand student experiences and perspectives in online writing courses. Even though literature on online writing pedagogy is vast and growing due to increasing numbers of students taking OWCs, it is worth understanding if instructors’ intentions and their perceptions of what should be happening in OWCs matches student perceptions of what is happening to and for them in these classes. Such determinations cannot be known unless students contribute to the body of knowledge on this subject. In other words, simply looking at student evaluations at the end of each semester is insufficient; students must be participants in the research process, which was a major goal of this study.

In reading and assessing student needs from the student point of view, we encourage instructors to consider student preparation for online writing courses and to investigate methods that may more successfully orient students to online writing courses. Additionally, as instructors develop courses, they should design course elements while considering what components of online writing courses students find most helpful and least helpful in improving their writing. Exploring creative yet effective ways to integrate these helpful components will improve student experience in OWI. These efforts may necessitate collaboration with instructional designers, central offices of distance learning, department heads, and writing program coordinators. Interdisciplinary associations of this nature allow for coordination among areas of expertise and communication between faculty, staff, and administrators to meet the common objective of student success and satisfaction.

Even with the limitations of this survey, student responses provide instructors and administrators with new conversations and topics for further investigation regarding how to best teach writing online. One of the most important conversations is how to measure pedagogical impact of OWCs on student writing. Online writing instruction is distinct from distance education courses in other disciplines, and it is important that students see and understand these distinctions. One point made repeatedly in the student data was the absence of rationale for course design and course work. If students are made aware of and taught how to intentionally use feedback and online writing tools to improve their writing, they will understand the online writing activities they are asked to do and connect those activities with their own writing strengths and weaknesses, thus improving their understanding of writing and their writing skills as well.

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## A Call for Purposeful Pedagogy-driven Course Design in OWI

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### Abstract

Best practices in online writing instruction (OWI) have been developed and refined for more than a decade. A recent report on student perception of online writing courses (OWCs) revealed an overlooked yet crucial component of OWI—the need to move from what content should be included in an OWC and toward why it should be included to how to improve pedagogical practices in OWCs. We propose purposeful pedagogy-driven course design as a framework that emphasizes the role of the teacher in making connections across pedagogical activities to center course design on student learning.

**Keywords:** *online writing instruction (OWI), student voices, pedagogy, online writing courses (OWCs), purposeful pedagogy-driven course design*

*I don't feel that this class has helped me improve my writing.*

--Student response from national survey

## Introduction

The need to understand student perspectives of online writing courses (OWCs) led the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction (hereafter called the *OWI Committee*) to task a student-survey working group<sup>3</sup> to develop and conduct a national survey for online writing students. The survey research sought to answer four research questions:

1. How are students prepared for, or oriented to, their online writing courses specifically?
2. How do students typically access their online writing courses?
3. What components of online writing classes do students find most helpful in improving their writing?
4. What components of online writing classes do students find least helpful in improving their writing?

As the members of the student-survey working group began to analyze the student survey data ("A Report on a U.S.-Based National Survey of Students in Online Writing Courses"), something interesting happened. We read comments, like the student epigram at the beginning of this article, from student respondents who stated that they need online instructors to explicitly teach them to improve their writing skills. These comments made us realize that OWI instructors need to rethink pedagogical design practices for OWCs. The student survey revealed that even with the gains in research and understanding of effective practices in OWI (see OWI Committee's [2013] *A Position Statement of Principles and Example of Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction*, hereafter called the *OWI Principles* document), writing studies, composition, and technical and professional communication (TPC) educators need to consider effective pedagogy in online settings rather than simply migrating and/or adapting existing pedagogical models to online courses. While the *OWI Principles* document informs our research and theory, we do not always directly reference the principles as we discuss our research findings because we want to foreground the student experiences as shown through their responses. In addition, part of our goal of this article is to turn attention to the "how" of

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<sup>3</sup> The authors of this article were members of this student-survey working group

online writing instruction rather than the “what” and “why” that is the basis of the existing OWI principles.

While students will always come to writing courses, particularly OWCs, with a range of preparation, life obstacles, and accessibility challenges that are, for the most part, beyond instructors’ control, instructors *can control* their presence within the learning management systems (LMS) and/or online courses. We use the word *presence* as it is defined in online education literature across disciplines. *Presence* means the sense that the teacher is in attendance or embodied in the OWC by virtue of connecting with students and being responsive to their needs.<sup>4</sup> The student survey data indicate that a purposeful pedagogy-driven course design in OWI is necessary. Purposeful pedagogy-driven OWCs “produce intellectually rigorous online learning experiences that are not weak replicas of onsite courses” (Cargile Cook, 2005, p. 51).

In this article, we highlight some of the qualitative data from the open-ended questions in the OWI student survey. This data highlights ways to shift online teaching to better meet student needs with purposeful pedagogy-driven course design. We challenge current faculty pedagogical preparation in OWI, and we look to education and other fields for models of how to create purposeful pedagogy-driven courses. After providing an example of this approach, we offer next steps for OWI pedagogy and teaching. OWI has reached a point in its development that instructors and administrators need to move from what should be included in an OWC and why it should be included to how to improve pedagogical practices in OWCs. Furthermore, we argue that a purposeful pedagogy-driven course design must move away from focusing first on texts, assignments, or technologies and toward focusing on the students—the learners—as the necessary first step of effective course design.

### Listening to Students' Voices

As described in “A Report on a U.S.-based National Survey of Students in Online Writing Courses,” the majority of respondents to the national survey were upper level students who were taking a Technical and Professional Communication focused OWC (see the demographic section of the “A Report”). When asked “What is not included in your online writing class that would benefit the learning experience for you in relation to improving your writing?” only 28% (39 of n=139) were from freshman or sophomore-level students. It is not surprising that more

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of teacher presence also is discussed in literature about Communities of Inquiry, which is one way to establish presence. For a discussion of communities of inquiry in relation to OWI, see Stewart, 2018.

advanced-level students responded and provided constructive feedback, especially since the majority of all students who participated in the national student survey had previously taken an online course.

In the forthcoming subsections, we provide representative qualitative responses from the student survey on the following:

- Readings
- Quizzes and assignments
- Discussion boards
- Feedback from instructors and student peers
- Multimedia materials

These pedagogical components, which are crucial to OWCs, are referenced in the OWI Principles document (CCCC OWI Committee, 2013). These effective practices are also areas in which OWI has some available research.

In each subsection, we define the pedagogical activity and then offer the number of qualitative responses to the following three questions:

- Please identify what work in your current online writing course is the **most valuable or helpful** to you in improving your writing and explain why.
- Please identify what work in your current online writing course is the **least valuable or helpful** to you in improving your writing and explain why.<sup>5</sup>

When analyzing these student comments as data points in the survey, it is important to note that the number of responses may seem small in relation to the total number of respondents. Yet, these student voices were critical to the survey results overall. We believe that if only one student took the time to write something about his or her OWC, instructors must consider that response as providing much-needed context for students' reactions to and success within OWCs. Open-ended questions are expansion questions--the type of questions on a survey design that provide participants the opportunity elaborate on answers to forced-choice questions (O'Cathain & Thomas, 2004). These student voices are vital as instructors and researchers consider how to improve OWI for student learning. Furthermore, throughout this section, we forefront the voices of students who found learning activities "least helpful". While

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<sup>5</sup> Not all students answered one or both of these questions.

there were just as many positive comments about OWCs regarding what students found helpful, these voices expressing dissatisfaction indicate that something about the OWCs was insufficient and bears scrutiny.

## Readings

Readings refer to the instructional materials provided in the online class, including selections from textbooks, articles (e.g., academic, trade, popular press), and supplemental materials (e.g., lecture notes).

- Students who commented that readings were helpful: 8% (n=25; total n=314)
- Students who commented that readings were unhelpful 11% (n=25; total n=226)

Students' negative responses about readings include<sup>6</sup> the following:

*Reading a textbook about writing is not helpful I think it takes more experience and practice to develop writing skills.*

*I think the course readings are somewhat hard to follow at times, especially since we can't see an in-person demonstration or explanation of the material. There are times it feels like it would be quicker and easier to learn some of the book material in class, so we can learn from our peers and professor about our specific concerns right then and there in class.*

*The readings are hard to follow because the book doesn't really explain terms very well.*

*The assigned textbook is the least helpful. The materials for this particular course that are being supplemented by the professor are of greater value and help than the text.*

These student responses regarding reading illustrate problems with course design. Instructors in these classes may not have explained difficult terms or jargon or the relevance of the readings to their writing and to the overall course learning objectives.

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<sup>6</sup> The concept of teacher presence also is discussed in literature about Communities of Inquiry, which is one way to establish presence. For a discussion of communities of inquiry in relation to OWI, see Stewart, 2018.

Students expressed frustration with reading quizzes used to test whether they did the reading in particular because they did not know how reading about writing could improve their writing. Several students mentioned they did not want to read about writing; they wanted to practice it. They also noted that they were often left on their own to understand the readings, which may be a common feature in an asynchronous course but also may reflect lack of instructor engagement and presence in the course.

Student responses about reading echo the reading difficulties that Beth L. Hewett (2015a) addresses, in particular the cognitive leaps students must make from what they read to what they write. Hewett asserts that reading issues are exacerbated in online settings where the teacher cannot intervene upon seeing or hearing student confusion. OWI teachers may see students struggling through their reading quizzes or in discussion board responses and essay assignments, but they cannot diagnose whether the struggle is a comprehension problem (whether the student has a lack of knowledge in the subject area or a lack of reading skills), a problem with the digital or textual presentation of the reading itself (an accessibility issue), or a design issue (the lack of explicit connection between the reading and the subsequent discussion board or essay).

Instructors and course designers (or instructors as course designers) may fail to communicate tacit assumptions about how reading works in a college class and how students should use reading to improve writing. Readings must be integrated into an overall course design in a purposeful and explicitly stated manner. Where a reading directly advances a course objective, teachers need to explain to OWI students how and why it does so. If a reading does not directly advance a course objective, then it should be removed.

### **Quizzes and Assignments**

We discuss quizzes and assignments together since they are both assessment instruments. Quizzes and assignments in OWCs generally serve three purposes:

1. They inform students what they are expected to write about to meet the course objective/s.
2. They walk students through the steps that they should take to complete a process (instructional).
3. They tell students how they will be evaluated on their processes/products (evaluative).

Quizzes in OWCs generally check students' comprehension of assigned readings through forced-choice or open-ended questions. Quizzes might also evaluate skills that students have not yet covered in the class to assess student competency.

- Students who commented that quizzes were helpful: 1% (n=4; total n=314)
- Students who commented that quizzes were unhelpful: 5% (n=10; total n=226)

Students' negative responses about quizzes—one kind of assessment—included:

*Quizzes.... really?*

*Weekly quizzes are the least helpful as they are not critically assessing whether we understand how to apply the material but rather only measuring if we read the material.*

*Quizzes/Assessments/Test. To me, these are just spaces where you have to regurgitate the information that you have learned. If on these there were an application portion then that would be beneficial but otherwise it is mainly short-term memory skills that are being tested.*

*The quizzes don't help me to improve my writing. They are just an added assignment.*

*Practicing writing helps me to improve.*

Students' responses regarding quizzes point to frustration with how a course's checkpoints may be integrated with the overarching course outcomes. Students may not perceive that checkpoints are connected to their writing process and see them instead as perfunctory—busy work instead of instruction that helps them develop writing skills. Indeed, this perception makes sense if the instructor has not connected quizzes directly to the writing skills to be developed (scaffolding) or if the instructor does not use information gathered from quizzes to address student learning in the class and to do so in overt ways that students find sensible.

Assignments are summative assessments designed to have students show their level of competency related to a learning outcome. In OWI—or in any online course—assignments should be developed to evaluate how well students can meet the course learning outcomes.



- Students who commented that assignments were helpful: 8% (n=27; total n=314)
- Students who commented that assignments were unhelpful: 9% (n=21; total n=226)

Students' negative responses about assignments included:

*Having to write so many papers in such little time was not helpful. It made things really tough and hard to complete assignments on time. (from a 5-9 week composition course)*

*I need more defined instructions for assignments.*

*[Need] clearly written assignment instructions. [as a response to what was not included in the course]*

*The discussion board assignment were least helpful...I think a simple handout would of sufficed for 4 weeks worth [of] the discussion board assignments.*

*Concerned that my fellow classmates and I aren't given a lot of context for our writing assignments, and therefore we do not put in a lot of time and energy into them...why we're writing is not made clear, in other words. How is a literary analysis going to help me do my job?*

While students did find and comment on the helpfulness of assignments, the number of students who shared thoughts like the ones above suggests a lack of integration between the assignments and other parts of the course. The comments about why an assignment was not helpful were much more specific than the positive comments about the helpfulness of assignments. For example, a representative comment about the helpfulness of an assignment is the following: the proposal was helpful because it was such a lengthy assignment. Students in OWCs should be given the opportunity to practice skills in the learning outcomes on which they will be assessed (perhaps using low-stakes assignments and quizzes) before major assessments. They should have ample opportunity to understand the assignment (which also is a reading demand on them) and to practice the needed skills before high-stakes assessments of those skills.

The students' responses covered much ground about their dissatisfaction with assignments. Comments that indicated there was too much work in a compressed course suggest that the pedagogical approach may need to be considered when courses are compressed. Comments

about the clarity of assignments indicate instructors must have specific training to help them be effectively present in an online course. Clear instructional materials are a genre just like poetry, fiction, or nonfiction (or “discussion boards” for that matter)—a genre most online instructors have not studied or explicitly learned (Hewett, 2015a). Instructors can demonstrate online presence not only through feedback but also through effective instructional materials that are clearly written and explained for both their student audience and the digital environment. Because the bulk of instructional materials in OWCs are written, instructions must be carefully composed to reduce or mitigate the cognitive reading load for students and instructors alike (Hewett, 2015a, pp. 59-65; Griffin & Minter, 2013). In an online setting, overt explanations must be made through the teacher’s writing or through video/voice lectures that clearly convey both expectations and educational strategies involved.

### Discussion Boards

Discussion boards refer to any pedagogical activity that takes place in the forum/discussion board area of an LMS (see the “Next Steps” section of this article for why this term is complicated).

- Students who commented that discussion boards were helpful: 7% (n=22; total n=314)
- Students who commented that discussion boards were unhelpful: 18% (n=41; total n=226)

Students’ negative responses about discussion boards included the following:

*Discussion boards can help generate new ideas but don’t necessarily help my writing, in my opinion.*

*Discussion board posts don’t give much feedback as to writing improvement. But, this could be due to the topics of the DBs.*

*Discussion posts. They seem to be used as “filler” points for the class. I have yet to complete a discussion post that brings value to the course.*

*Discussions. I feel like I don’t get much out of the peer reviews and discussions because the other students in the course don’t give me feedback I find helpful.*

*The discussion board is the least valuable because I feel people just are writing to complete it rather than having meaningful discussion.*

*I have never found discussion boards to adequately replace in-class discussion, and I still feel this way about the discussion board posts we have done for this class.*

*No feedback from instructor on discussion boards.*

Many survey participants expressed that discussion board participation was “forced,” resulting in thoughtless, meaningless responses. They reported not understanding how the writing they produced in discussion posts improved their overall writing skills for the course purposes, and they did not see how written discussions with peers could improve their writing in any meaningful way. Other students in this survey study expressed that they did not see discussion boards as an adequate replacement for face-to-face class discussions.

Nearly half the students in this survey indicated they were older than twenty-four, making them “non-traditional” students. Michael Gos (2015) argued that time-bound, non-traditional students particularly may find participating in discussion boards for more than limited amounts of time to be difficult. In a study of over 900 online students, Adam Selhorst, Mingzhen Bao, Lorraine Williams, and Eric Klein Selhorst (2017) found that “excess focus on online discussions may lead to fatigue, resulting in lower student satisfaction, and in turn, performance” (abstract).

Student responses from this study indicate that students do not see discussion boards as places that provide low-stakes writing practice (Warnock, 2007, 2010) or as replacing face-to-face discussion. When integrating discussion boards, online instructors should consider how particular discussion prompts explicitly connect to learning objectives, explain such connections to students, and forgo otherwise unconnected discussions and discussions created merely to make use of that function of the LMS as students may perceive them as wasting their time. Furthermore, they should model communicative presence for students to help them see how discussion board conversations can work fruitfully.

## **Instructor Feedback**

Instructor feedback refers to interactive response to student writing provided by the instructor of the course. This feedback can be formative (given on an early draft to identify areas for improvement) or summative (given on a final draft to indicate how the student has met the assignment and course learning outcomes).

- Students who commented that instructor feedback were helpful: 35% (n=110; total n=314)
- Students who commented that instructor feedback were unhelpful: 2% (n=5; total n=226)

Students' positive responses about instructor feedback included the following:

*In my opinion, instructor feedback is the most valuable or helpful. The instructor grades according to rubric and they explain why the paper may or may not have touched on all require information.*

*Direct comments on a written item from the professor. Its the most personal to me and can help me see my downfalls and where I need to improve. I think having students review work is positive, but value of reviews is often not that helpful for me personally.*

*Receiving instructor feedback is the most helpful in improving my writing, because sometimes students don't have all the information that my professor has that could help me.*

Students' negative responses about instructional feedback included:

*if we only turn things in and don't receive feedback from professor*

*Lack of feedback on writing*

*Generally, feedback, because I've received very little and what I did receive was snarky, or perhaps just abrupt.*

In reading through all the open-ended responses, it is apparent that students valued instructors and their writing expertise, and students wanted feedback to improve their writing. Even though there were so few participant responses regarding instructor feedback as unhelpful, the fact that there were any such responses is problematic and points to the need to ensure that feedback is always offered as a means to help students improve their writing.

Multiple studies have considered the relationship between instructor feedback and a positive perception of the instructor's social presence (Cunningham, 2015; Eaton, 2005, 2013). Students demonstrated positive reactions to instructor feedback for collaborative projects (Alvarez, Espasa, & Guasch, 2012), on traditional assignments (Boyd, 2008; Cox, Black, Heney, & Keith, 2015), and OWI-based assignments (Hewett, 2004-2005, 2015b). Overwhelmingly, the survey respondents reported the most helpful aspect of an OWC was feedback from the instructor.

Instructors establish presence through feedback, and students see this feedback as directly helpful in improving their writing. Thus, how and when instructors provide feedback is critical. Stephanie Cox, Jennifer Black, Jill Heney, and Melissa Keith (2015) state: "Online writing students and instructors know each other primarily through the direct learning process, which brings certain benefits. A drawback to the online environment, however, is that the majority of individual student-teacher interactions occur as feedback to students about their writing, and this situation always contains some degree of evaluation" (p. 376). Yet, we believe that feedback to writing—which is often associated with assessment, whether it is formative or summative—cannot be the only place where instructors are present in a course, and the instructor should not rely on feedback as a primary means of providing instructional content. While instruction can happen in instructor feedback (see Hewett, 2015b), instructor feedback should not be the only place where students have direct contact with their instructor in the OWC.

## Peer Feedback

Peer feedback refers to student-to-student commentary on writing. In the open-ended comments, some students saw peer-review as more helpful than unhelpful.

- Students who commented that peer feedback were helpful: 22% (n=68; total n=314)
- Students who commented that peer feedback were unhelpful: 15% (n=33; total n=226)

Students' positive responses about peer feedback included the following:

*I think the feedback is the most helpful because you get to see different opinions on it.*

*Definitely, feedback from my classmates. I was able to see what I was doing wrong or could improve on before submission to the teacher.*

*It was most helpful having feedback from peers and my teacher and being able to stay in constant communication because I was able to identify what needed work in my writing.*

*Peer reviews is hands down the most helpful asset in this course as it helps other students perfect their own work when critiquing others.*

*Those who experienced peer review as helpful indicated that peers provided an audience other than the instructor from whom they could learn different perspectives on their ideas and writing. On the opposite side of the spectrum, about half as many students found peer feedback to be the least helpful work in an OWC.*

*Students' negative responses about peer feedback included the following:*

*If I had to pick one, I would say peer feedback, just because peers are usually not trained in written response. The way they frame their comments can sometimes come across as rude or they comment on areas that aren't that important, instead of areas that would be helpful.*

*I find that peer reviews tend to be the least valuable, because most students and simply participating for the credit rather than giving meaningful information to improve the documents.*

*Probably giving others feedback. If it were a paper I might have more insight. But for a couple hundred word discussion post, it's sometimes hard to come up with something constructive to say. Obviously feedback from other students or the professor depends on the quality.*  
*giving feedback to other students on their work is completely a waste of time.*  
*most of the time we are just BSing through it.*

The difficulties some students had with peer feedback suggest that they saw the instructor as the expert in the class who should provide feedback to improve writing. Instructors should examine their courses for whether too much emphasis is placed on learners learning from each other; where, when, and how students provide comments; and what instructors and peers are commenting on. The rationale for peer feedback and explicit instruction in how to complete

peer review need to be emphasized within the OWC, and these could afford instructors the opportunity to model this type of feedback.

Students' self-reported emphasis on feedback raised questions about whether feedback is being used as a replacement for student-instructor interaction in the OWC. Peer feedback should supplement but not replace instructor feedback. Instructor-to-student and student-to-student feedback provides critical personal interaction that students appear to crave and can be missing in other components of the course, particularly in the asynchronous modality.

### **Multimedia Materials**

Multimedia materials include any materials that incorporate print text, images, video, audio, and other non-alphabetic methods of communication. The questions regarding multimedia materials, like the questions about the discussion boards, reveal a fundamental problem in how instructors identify multimedia in technological rather than pedagogical terms.

- Students who commented that multimedia materials were helpful: 6% (n=21; total n=314)
- Students who commented that multimedia materials were unhelpful: 20% (n=46; total n=226)

Students' positive responses about multimedia included the following:

*Videos and PowerPoints can be helpful, and my professor is accessible for any questions that we may have, which is extremely helpful for me. We also have worksheets that help us understand each chapter, and our professor highlights the important details in the links to our assignments; this definitely helps me understand the material better, so there are ways to overcome obstacles that prevent face-to-face interaction.*

*Videos help me visually on what is being asked*

*PowerPoints [a one-word response to what was most helpful]*

*Poorly designed multimedia materials or those inserted into a text out of context (without instructor explanation or guidance) were considered less helpful.*

Students' negative responses about multimedia included the following:

*Videos (and to a lesser extent, podcasts). They either move too quickly and require multiple repeats of content, or grind along at an excruciatingly slow pace that quickly grows tiresome.*

*I'm not fond of slides. I learn very little from that—sometimes it's too condensed for me to make much sense of it.*

*I hate power point slides. They load slow and often just use the same words as in the textbook.*

*PowerPoint: unless there is sufficient explanation, slides without audio or accompanying reading assignments are vague.*

*The least valuable activities are the videos and PowerPoints. I don't seem to learn from them.*

As with responses about reading (reported above), a lack of context, a lack of knowledge of how to apply the information to their writing, and the amount of slides students received were common complaints about videos and slide presentations. The media used may have been used poorly or may not have appealed to these students' learning preferences.

*I found the video responses to be the least helpful to my writing abilities. They were more focused on responding to social issues but I find writing out thoughts to be a more productive source of learning.*

*creating videos. this helps my speaking skills but not my writing skills.*

*Videos because I usually don't have the time to sit down and watch them. If I do, I am distracted and don't learn anything from them*

Comments regarding videos appear to have involved both students who were producing videos and students who were *consuming* them. Thus, students were differentiating between videos as instructional content (to supplement or in lieu of readings) and video creation as assignments. The survey, however, did not make this distinction; this further indicates how instructors make assumptions about multimedia as a means of



accommodating learners and providing content rather than as a tool that students can use to demonstrate learning outcomes.

The *OWI Principles* document (CCCC OWI Committee, 2013) frames multimedia use as an accessibility issue. OWI Principle 1 states, “Online writing instruction should be universally inclusive and accessible.” Effective Practice 1.10 exhorted faculty to

offer instructional materials in more than one medium. For example, a photograph or other graphic on the course Web space should be described textually. For another example, critical textual material should be described orally using an audio feature. Similarly, a teacher’s video should be transcribed or closely paraphrased textually to accommodate a deaf student or one with auditory learning disabilities. Students should have a choice about whether to receive an essay response orally (through digital recording) or textually; alternatively, students might receive one essay response orally and the next one textually. If these practices seem onerous, it is helpful to *remember that multimodality assists all learners and not just those with special challenges*.  
[emphasis ours]

Nonetheless, while accommodating for disabilities is of key importance in an OWC, framing multimodal learning materials only in terms of accommodation discounts the pedagogical purpose of multimedia technology to benefit all learners. To summarize and paraphrase a wide body of work on what instructional designers call “the multimedia principle,” “people learn better from words and pictures [and sound] than from words alone” (Clark & Mayer, 2016, p. 67). However, students’ comments on multimedia materials in online courses revealed that they experienced better learning through multimedia only when that multimedia was instructor-led and carefully designed.

In the next section, we consider these student responses in light of existing literature in OWI as we move toward making a case for purposeful, pedagogy-driven course design.

### **Connecting Student Voices to Existing Literature**

When the student-survey working group reflected on the student data and what it might mean for OWI educators, we decided to return to the existing literature to consider how to address the problems that students had pointed out. In other words, we wondered what published literature says about how to teach in online environments.

Education scholars appear to lead the way in research regarding purposeful online teaching and learning. Michelle Horton's (2017) research examined the need for continuous development of pedagogical skills in an online learning environment. Horton's qualitative study focused on five instructors in different disciplines (e.g., computer science, mathematics, nursing, psychology, and sociology), and her findings suggest that developing an organized course structure is a major key to student success. While Horton does not consider writing courses, her findings remind educators that online teaching requires ongoing work into developing the necessary pedagogical skills to teach effectively online.

Liyan Song, Ernise Singleton, Jannette Hill, and Myung Koh (2004) surveyed graduate students to identify helpful characteristics of their online learning. Their findings are different from those of the undergraduate student survey reported herein and in "A Report on a U.S.-Based National Survey of Students in Online Writing Courses." Song et al. found that course design impacts the success of the online learning experience, and there are challenges associated with understanding the learning objectives of the online course. Students indicated that course design affects the success of their online learning experiences.

Prior to this national survey of students in OWCs, Patricia Webb Boyd's (2008) research was one of the first (and still only one of a few studies) to ask students about their experiences in OWCs. Boyd's first-year composition students wanted more interaction with their instructor, and they expressed they were uncertain as to why they were being asked to do certain tasks. She concludes that course design must be purposeful and explicit: "When creating online courses, then, the instructor must make her/his reasoning behind the course design clear—in other words, make visible the ways in which the course design itself challenges traditional conceptions of student-teacher interactions" (p. 240). In addition to purposeful and explicit design, instructors must throughout the course "provide meta-commentary about the purpose of the assignments and the learning principles upon which they are based" (p. 240). Boyd writes, "it might seem odd for me to focus so heavily on the teacher's role in online classrooms" (p. 240), but Webb's emphasis on the instructor aligns with our own growing concern that OWI still does not focus enough on how instructor presence impacts the OWC.

Thus, research in education and some research in OWI led us back to instructors and their preparedness. We drew on key texts in OWI research and categorized the goals of that research. OWI research related to faculty preparation can be categorized into three broad categories:

- **Holistic:** Approaches that give instructors the basic building blocks for what to teach in an online writing course; these are merged with writing, literacy, and reading theories.
- **Conceptual frameworks:** Approaches that help instructors see process of online course development and online learning from a big picture perspective; these are intended to make the process of first starting to teach online more manageable.
- **Practical:** Approaches that are specific to providing different forms of faculty development for teaching online.

Scott Warnock's *Online Writing Instruction: Why and How* (2009, 2015) is a key example of an holistic approach, particularly the chapters on course lessons and organization. Another example is found in part three of *Reading to Learn and Writing to Teach*, where Hewett (2015a) offers specific tips and techniques for the written teaching processes of online feedback, writing assignments, and communicating with students. These books do not consider OWC course design specifically.

Key examples of conceptual frameworks include the following:

- Beth L. Hewett and Christa Ehmann's (2004) five principles of investigation, immersion, individualization, association, and reflection.
- Lisa Melonçon's (2007, 2017) landscapes schema, which extend Hewett and Ehmann (2004) specifically to OWI; these are the different structures and people (institution, department, field, faculty, industry, pedagogy, program) that can affect the creation and delivery of OWI.
- Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch's (2015) 4-M design approach to "moving" courses online consisting of migration, model, modality and media, and morale.

Other examples include Rich Rice (2015) and Jessie Borgman and Casey McCardle (n.d.). In each of these key examples, guidance is offered at the conceptual level to create and sustain OWCs. The same is true for "instructional principles" in the OWI Principles document (CCCC OWI Committee, 2013). For example, OWI Principle 2 states, "An online writing course should focus on writing and not on technology orientation or teaching students how to use learning and other technologies." None of the example effective practices provide pedagogical guidance on how to teach writing online. Instead, the example effective practices offer instructors and administrators necessary information to make localized arguments that move OWI away from a focus on technology. Even OWI Principle 4, which states, "Appropriate onsite composition theories, pedagogies, and strategies should be migrated and adapted to the

online instructional environment,” places the emphasis on “migrating” and “adapting” rather on the practical specifics of how theories can be adapted in online settings. The “instructional principles” are another example of conceptual frameworks. In other words, the research discussed in this section on conceptual approaches provides ample information for instructors who want to begin teaching online and what should be considered when decisions are made to teach writing online, but they fail to adequately identify the how in specific pedagogical terms and practices.

Key examples of practical approaches include building and maintaining courses through a community of practice (Melonçon & Arduser, 2013; Melonçon, 2017) and mentoring (Jaramillo-Santoy & Cano-Monreal 2013). Additionally, some research exists addressing scaffolding assignments (Grady & Davis, 2005; Harris & Greer, 2016) and considering new approaches to course materials in online environments (e.g., Cason & Jenkins, 2013; Dutkiewicz, Holder, & Sneath, 2013; Thatcher & St.Amant, 2011; Tillery & Nagelhout, 2013).

A growing body of OWI literature indicates that instructors and administrators need to consider the best way to deliver content online rather than simply porting face-to-face pedagogical practices into online environments (Cargile Cook & Grant-Davie, 2012; Hewett & DePew, 2015; OWI Principle 3, CCCC OWI Committee, 2013; Palmquist et al., 2008). Some of this work provides examples of how specific pedagogical practices focus more specifically on the affordances of online spaces rather than simply transferring face-to-face content to online spaces (Harris, Lubbes, Knowles, & Harris, 2014; Marshall, 2016; Skurat Harris, Nier-Weber, & Borgman, 2016). As one alumnae of an online writing program remarks, “There’s a difference between building an online class and putting something ‘online’” (Kuralt, Harris, Blackmon, Osborn, Haile, & Zamani, 2018).

While this is not a comprehensive review of the OWI literature regarding online course design, it does provide an important perspective on the current state of research by trying to categorize the research into its overarching holistic, conceptual, and practical goals. In doing so, we recognized that while much OWI research implicitly discusses pedagogy and course materials, it does not directly move from what should be done in online course to how to actually accomplish it. In other words, OWI scholars have not yet adequately addressed how to teach writing in online settings (see the one example we could find: Bourelle & Hewett, 2017). We use data from “[A Report on a U.S.-Based National Survey of Students in Online Writing Courses](#)” to argue that online writing instructors must now work with students to identify how

to best teach writing in online settings (Warnock & Gasiewski, 2018 provides an example and insights into one such approach).

In the next section, we offer a framework—purposeful pedagogy-driven course design—for addressing how to teach writing in online settings, and then we provide an example of this framework in action. In the framework and the example, we stress the instructor’s role in creating the course content and facilitating the work of the course.

### **Purposeful Pedagogy**

The sub-field of OWI understands what makes OWCs successful. Early research has provided the theory on which to build (Cargile Cook & Grant-Davie, 2012, p. 1), but online writing instructors and scholars should focus on how to apply those theories in practice. Online writing instructors need to identify specific pedagogical approaches that arise from such theory and connect those approaches to practice that meets student needs, such as those indicated in the first section of this article and in “A Report on a U.S.-Based National Survey of Students in Online Writing Courses.”

To put theory into practice requires an emphasis on how instructors construct their online writing courses. Currently, many OWCs are simply porting face-to-face instruction into the online environment without sufficient attention to the ways the content of the course is connected. That is, in online courses (more so than face-to-face courses), there is an increased need for the instructor to provide instruction and explanation on how the parts of the course go together and what students should expect to do and learn.

In addition, current models of instructional design separate the design of the online shell from the content and the teaching practice. This approach continues the tradition of putting too much emphasis on technology rather than pedagogy.

Thus, we argue that OWCs require purposeful and deliberate connection between course components through content and design to help students become better writers. While instructional designers may assist with the technological aspects of the design, instructors as writing experts need to be in charge and in control of content and how the content should work within and throughout the design of the course shell. These claims, when read alongside the data from students and OWI’s existing literature, suggest that instructors need a different type of preparation to effectively teach writing online than what they may currently receive.

Therefore, we offer a framework that takes the what and why found in much of the literature and puts it into action by focusing on the how of specific pedagogical terms and practices for effective OWI classes.

Purposeful pedagogy-driven course design creates environments where each reading, activity, assignment, and assessment correlates with the course learning outcomes. This deliberate integration of different parts of an OWC offers students the opportunity to practice writing and to learn and develop the skills necessary to meet the course learning outcomes—in other words, to help students improve their writing. We borrow part of the phrase “pedagogy-driven” from Kelli Cargile Cook (2005), who was one of the first in OWI to talk specifically about the need to focus on pedagogy in online settings rather than on technology. She argues that “pedagogy-driven online education has its own set of underlying assumptions and values, which require instructors to re-evaluate and articulate their theories of learning, their instructional strategies and course activities, and their assessment strategies before choosing delivery technologies and moving a course online” (p. 51). Thus, we should reconsider the current practice of simply “moving” courses into online environments without carefully and thoughtfully considering what additional instructional materials need to be added to ensure that students can see how the component parts of a course work together.

Cargile Cook’s pedagogy-driven approach aligns with research in education that argues for “constructive alignment” (Biggs & Tang, 2011, p. 109). In a “constructively aligned system, all components—intended learning outcomes, teaching/learning activities, assessment tasks and their grading—support each other, so the learner is enveloped within a supportive learning system” (p. 109). To achieve this pedagogy-driven learning system, we add the term purposeful to shift the focus away from texts, assignments, or technologies and toward the learners—the students—at the heart of the course as the beginning of effective course design.

### **Components of Purposeful Pedagogy-driven Courses**

The overarching argument that we are making—that OWI educators must focus on how they teach writing online—might prompt some defensiveness from current online writing instructors who have had success in their OWCs. We understand, of course, that instructors are teaching OWI and many are doing so with pedagogical successes and student satisfaction. Yet, we believe more can be accomplished by focusing on how one teaches OWI rather than what one should be teaching. To that end, purposeful pedagogy-driven course design helps OWI educators understand the critical relationships between teacher presence in the class and the course design. Figure 1 is a visual representation of this framework.

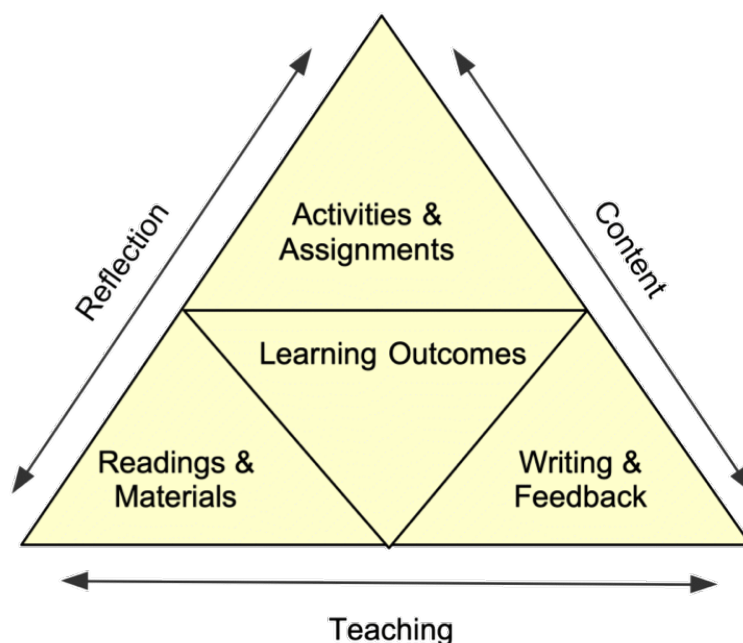


Figure 1. A Framework for Purposeful Pedagogy in Online Writing Instruction

By reconfiguring a linear model of a syllabus and schedule (or a sequence of units or modules) into a connected shape that emphasizes the connections between different pedagogical parts of a course, A Framework for Purposeful Pedagogy in OWI can be used in any type of course, which is one reason for the broad emphasis. Figure 1's triangular shape emphasizes the connections among different pedagogical parts of a course. The Framework places the learning outcomes at the center of the encompassing triangle and within its own centralized triangle to indicate that primary focus in an OWC must regard what students need to learn or to do by the end of the term. The three other triangles within the overarching triangle illustrate how the outcomes can be met through the pedagogical components that instructors can control (even when using a standardized course shell):

- **Activities and Assignments:** Activities are the discrete scaffolded exercises that build to that assignments that assess those skills.
- **Writing and Feedback:** Student writing and instructor and peer reading of student writing comprise the main component of an OWC course.
- **Readings and Materials:** Foundational texts, articles, slide presentations, lecture notes, and the like provide students essential background information to assist them with activities, assignments, and their writing development.

The connections among these different parts of an OWC are the heart of purposeful pedagogy-driven course design. Without considering the OWC in these terms, instructors risk leaving students to make the connections themselves, which they may not have the skills, understanding, or even the interest to do on their own, as evidenced by survey answers where students did not understand why they were being asked to do things in their OWC (see also Hewett, 2015a).

The double-headed arrows outside of the overarching triangle in Figure 1 represent the iterative process of teaching. Instructors need to consistently reflect on the specific content or expertise required from students and instructors' own teaching approaches to determine how to make connections for the students. More so than in face-to-face courses, these sorts of pedagogical considerations are vital for online learning—particularly asynchronous but also synchronous OWCs—because of the lack of immediate physical presence of the instructor and peers. In other words, OWI educators must pay attention to how the course fits together but, just as importantly, to how they structure the language, their own writing (per Hewett, 2015a), and the pedagogy that ties them together. Such attention helps to embody the course with the teacher's ongoing, visible presence. Without these connections as indicated by double-headed arrows, the OWC risks becoming a series of disconnected modules that merely must be completed rather than a scaffolded, coherent writing course taught by a present instructor and designed to help students improve their writing.

Through this student survey reported herein and in "A Report on a U.S.-Based National Survey of Students in Online Writing Courses," students have expressed what they need and want in their OWCs. Overwhelmingly, the qualitative comments about helpful and least helpful aspects of the course revealed the significant complaints of students—not lazy students who did not want to be engaged in online courses—who wanted instructor participation and clearly expressed course planning to enable them to understand why they were doing the work they were being assigned. These students wanted to see the connection between the structure, content, and their learning in an OWC. In short, they wanted instructor-led classes driven by purposeful pedagogy.

### **Purposeful Pedagogy in Practice**

We have included two examples— a literacy narrative assignment and an assignment for a typical TPC service course—that provide more specific information of how to put purposeful pedagogy into practice. In what follows, we describe the changes made to a literacy narrative assignment to move it to a purposeful pedagogy-driven assignment.



### A common genre-focused assignment: literacy narratives.

In a genre-focused assignment, a disconnect between the assignment and its goals becomes clear. In the genre-focused class, students might read some literacy narratives composed by professional writers and be quizzed on the readings. Either the instructor or an automated system would score the quiz, possibly not explaining the results, and it would not be referred to again in the course. After the quiz, the instructor would ask students to write a draft of their own literacy narrative and share it with the class in a discussion board for peer feedback. Using such peer feedback, the instructor would require students to revise their drafts and submit them for feedback and/or a score. The instructor might then allow or require students to write a revised version of the literacy narrative for a portfolio or final grade. Thus, a unit in a traditional genre-focused class would look something like the simple, linear process depicted in Figure 2:

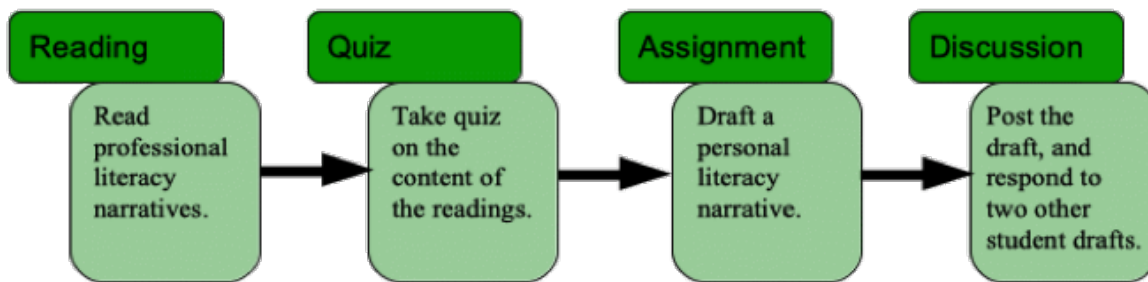


Figure 2: A Traditional Genre-Based Literacy Narrative Assignment Sequence

This reading, quiz, writing, discussion for feedback, and revision sequence assumes that students are able to do the following on their own:

1. Read critically and analyze the components of an unfamiliar genre (understand how the author is writing).
2. Repeat the content elements in a quiz scenario.
3. Understand how to transfer those components from professional readings to their own writing, making a cognitive leap to apply the components of the genre of “literacy narrative” as they brainstorm, write, and revise their own writing.
4. Discuss their written draft (the genre of literacy narrative essay) using the literary and revision terminology necessary to convey what has been accomplished well and what needs to be addressed in revision.
5. Use their knowledge of the genre of literacy narrative to complete an effective critical analysis of the writing of others in the genre of the discussion board.

6. Use the feedback provided by others to critically assess their own writing and revise based on that feedback.

These necessary skills are tacitly implied in a relatively straightforward literacy narrative assignment (and they echo common learning outcomes in writing courses taught in any environment). Yet, such skills often require a great deal of guidance and modeling from teachers and much practice by students. These abilities, in turn, can develop only with strong instructional writing skills on the teacher's part (Hewett, 2015a).

Our professional observation of OWCs, research into OWI, and the OWI student survey reported in "[A Report on a U.S.-Based National Survey of Students in Online Writing Courses](#)" strongly suggest that OWCs do not include sufficient, explicit, and direct instruction in most of the above elements. Instead, instructors might insert supplemental links to external resources (instructions from another course or program) without an explanation of how those resources connect to the steps of the writing process. Then, the instructors may ask students simply to read these resources (intuitively) and compose based on their largely implicit understanding. Upper-division and graduate students may transfer explicit instruction on these tasks from previous classes (see, for example, Anson & Moore, 2016; Ford, 2004; Schieber, 2016; Yancey, Taczak, & Robertson, 2014). But many students, including most first-year students, will need to have these skills explicitly taught to them in the OWC and may need overt explanations regarding why these skills are beneficial and how they will help students meet course learning outcomes and improve their writing.

### **Purposeful pedagogy-driven literacy narrative assignment.**

In purposeful pedagogy-driven design course, the instructor would begin with the skills the students need to accomplish and ask, "Where in the OWC does the student receive explicit instruction, feedback, and assessment for each of these skills?" Readings and materials teach skills practiced in activities, reinforced by feedback and instructor-student and student-student interaction, and are assessed in assignments that clearly evaluate student demonstration of course learning outcomes.

In this example, we demonstrate how online instructors can use purposeful pedagogy to teach the literacy narrative, focused on student experiences and the learning outcomes in the course. The unit first identifies common student learning outcomes that address the skills that students will need to practice and on which they will be assessed in the literacy narrative (see [Appendix A](#) for the learning outcomes and the complete learning sequence details).

This example assignment sequence can be used with almost any assignment. To implement the assignment online, we draw on the categories listed in Figure 1 and provide the following instructional steps to integrate purposeful pedagogy-driven design.

1. Explain how the assignment meets the course learning outcomes.
2. Assign sample student literacy narratives as well as some sample professional literacy narratives.
3. Develop appropriate activities and assignments. Examples include: discussion board conversations about how to understand literacy narratives; brainstorming exercises to develop possible scenes for literacy narratives with the instructor overtly modeling options and responses; writing assignments that ask students to develop drafts of literacy narratives; revision ideas through instructor feedback; peer review and feedback of a second draft through small groups or whole-class discussion boards; teaching how to accomplish peer response and providing model peer response for imitation.
  - Self-reflection letters to accompany final drafts.
4. Provide feedback and final grade or other assessment measures

The instructor's work is not yet complete at this point, however, because the connections between the parts of the assignment still need to be made explicit. For example, the student survey revealed that students are frustrated with discussion board assignments because they do not see how these assignments transfer to valuable writing experiences. In face-to-face classes, not every exercise is graded, but students typically have immediate feedback that clarifies how activities connect to assignment goals. The same experience needs to occur in an online course.

In this example, students might only respond to drafts for one particular learning outcome (something connected to the skills practiced in the discussion board about reading analysis, for example) rather than being asked to participate in a full peer review. Yet, they would do so with the instructor to guide their work. Furthermore, after completing the discussion boards, the instructor should provide a summary of those discussion boards (perhaps as a welcome announcement the following week) that explicitly discusses how the exercise builds on the readings and how the discussion boards will help them begin to write their literacy narrative. This step is crucial for student learning and addressing the expressed students' concerns in the survey. Instructors might also point back to one or two students' posts as model posts for the genre of discussion board post and one or two students posts as excellent brainstorming for the narrative, which centers student writing as the core of the class.

Finally, instructional approaches should be reviewed to connect readings and materials directly to the writing and feedback. Whenever possible, feedback should direct students back to the resources in the class. If students have a hard time incorporating details into their narratives, they should be directed back to one of the student-produced literacy narratives for the class. Instructors should ask permission of students who produced really excellent narratives and share them as examples for the class to read. Additionally, students might be asked to share their final narratives to class discussion board so that they can see how other students approached the topic without having to review or judge that writing. The instructor can then enter the discussion board to model making connections between the student writing in the class and the readings/examples that were used as models. Instructors should constantly work to connect student writing to the reading that they're doing and reinforce genre conventions whenever possible.

Purposeful pedagogy would include discussions that practice genre analysis and model close reading with overt instructor participation. In short, purposeful pedagogy would follow the cycle detailed in Figure 3.

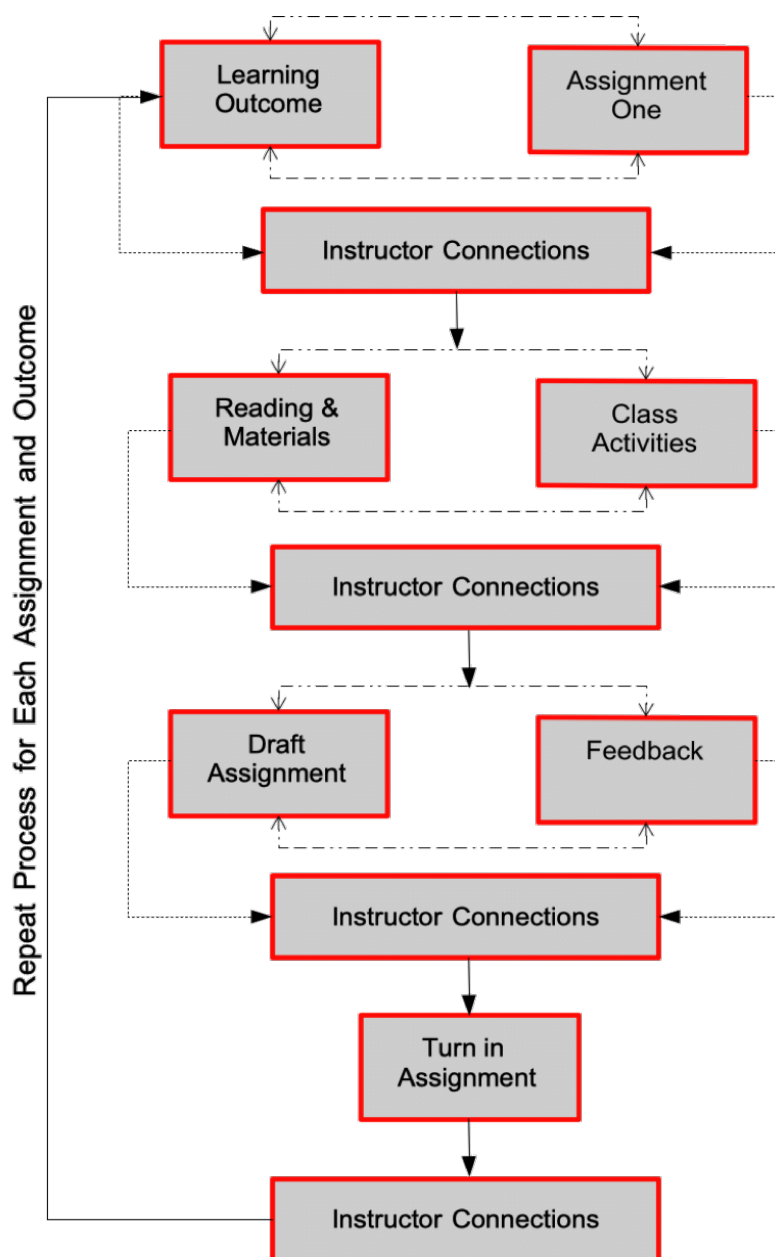


Figure 3. Purposeful Pedagogy Instructional Cycle

Purposeful pedagogy includes discussions that practice genre analysis and models close reading with instructor guidance. All of the lower-stakes activities in the course would practice the skills being assessed in the final assignment: the literacy narrative. See [Appendix A](#) for the complete literacy narrative assignment and [Appendix B](#) for a second extended example of how purposeful pedagogy can be implemented in composition courses and technical writing service courses. The extended examples provide the what, why, and how of purposeful pedagogy.

OWI educators can take a lesson from one student who reported that the instructor seems to be working toward a purposeful pedagogy-driven course design:

*There are times it feels like it would be quicker and easier to learn some of the book material in class, so we can learn from our peers and professor about our specific concerns right then and there in class. . . . We also have worksheets that help us understand each chapter, and our professor highlights the important details in the links to our assignments; this definitely helps me understand the material better, so there are ways to overcome obstacles that prevent face-to-face interaction.*

A well-designed purposeful pedagogy-driven OWC will come together like a perfectly designed puzzle where goals, objectives, activities, readings, and assignments fit together students move from where they are at the beginning of the class to where they need to be at the end.

### **Next Steps for Purposeful Pedagogy-Driven Course Design**

In this section, we discuss key elements that instructors and their administrators and instructional designers should consider for creating purposeful pedagogy-driven courses.

#### **Guidelines to support instructors in creating effective OWI classes:**

- Administrators must keep labor issues at the forefront of OWI and consider pedagogy in terms of labor issues.
- Instructors must emphasize pedagogy over technology.
- Administrators and instructional designers must provide purposeful-pedagogy training and professional development beyond the traditional teaching practicum course and beyond a course on how to use the LMS.
- Administrators and instructional designers must offer professional development that specifically addresses instructor and student displacement in online courses.
- Researchers need to expand OWI research to include more, and more in-depth, accounts of student experiences.

#### **Administrators must keep labor issues at the forefront of OWI and consider pedagogy in terms of labor issues.**

We frame the discussion of faculty preparation realizing that large-scale initiatives for such efforts primarily must come from administrators. The issues around faculty preparation and

pedagogical approaches are complicated—through no fault of the instructors themselves—when viewed through the lens of labor.

Andres Magda, Russell Poulin, and Davide Cliefelter (2015) indicated that 29% of institutions where Writing Studies online classes are taught use adjuncts or other part-time/contingent instructors to teach; that number rises to 49% at two-year institutions. Of those institutions, over 50% allowed adjunct faculty either to create their own courses or to have 100% customization over a previously developed class (p. 9). Only 35% of these institutions required instructor-led training in effective online pedagogy and only 26% required self-paced training regarding effective online pedagogy. This study helps to contextualize data regarding how many of those courses are taught in online settings, whether fully online or hybrid, and how faculty are prepared to facilitate these courses. A recent study of contingent faculty in composition and TPC asked instructors about their teaching loads, including teaching online. The study found that 53% of the contingent faculty surveyed taught online (Melonçon, Mechenbier, & Wilson, 2018), and while no field-wide data exists on the number of graduate students teaching online, it is important to consider this segment of “contingent faculty” in discussions of labor.

The OWI Principles (CCCC OWI Committee, 2013) addressed labor issues with specific recommendations that we emphasize as key to purposeful-pedagogy driven course design.

- OWI Principle 7: Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) for OWI programs and their online writing teachers should receive appropriate OWI-focused training, professional development, and assessment for evaluation and promotion purposes.
- OWI Principle 8: Online writing teachers should receive fair and equitable compensation for their work.

As these two OWI Principles clearly stated, all faculty—and, we argue, especially the contingent faculty that studies indicate may teach more than half of all OWCs—should receive adequate training and compensation when asked to teach online the first time, as well as ongoing support when OWCs remain part of their standard teaching load. Indeed, all faculty, including those contingent faculty in relatively stable teaching contracts, need specific training in OWI beyond simply how to use the LMS and who to call for technological issues.

We realize that we write from positions of relative power within higher education. We have more stable positions and can choose to research, write, and publish. Not all faculty or

instructors are in such a privileged position. To the end of arguing for OWI training, we understand that purposeful pedagogy must be contextually framed within the needs of those who teach at least half of all OWCs: faculty whose ongoing work is contingent on institutional financial exigency, student enrollment, and—sadly—occasional departmental whimsy.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, no discussion of OWI can be complete without direct attention to labor issues, and to the ends of developing a responsible, overt, consciously held purposeful OWI pedagogy, such attention is critically and ethically necessary.

### **Instructors must emphasize pedagogy over technology.**

The language educators adopt to describe a complex collaborative and community-building feature of online classes displaces instructors and students and foregrounds the tools and technologies. Moreover, using a singular term as if its use and meaning are clear compounds the confusion around multiple research studies on the same tool. For example, the student-survey working group made the error of asking students their thinking about “discussion boards” as if that description of a course tool did not have a wide range of uses and instructional approaches.

As Scott Warnock and Diana Gasiewski indicated (2018), however, the part of the LMS we call “discussion boards” can be used for any of the following activities:

1. Have a conversation about assigned texts/media.
2. Write-to-learn about specific content (and in writing about writing, that content is often writing itself).
3. Work on/explore a specific aspect of writing.
4. Generate ideas for writing projects.
5. Metawrite:
  1. About their own texts: write about their own writing.
  2. About texts (usually Discussions, but sometimes projects) composed by other students.
  3. About the course itself.
6. Argue about a topic.

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<sup>7</sup> We realize that some/most online faculty will be teaching an insane course load—some as many as 7-8 online classes at multiple institutions at one time—in order to survive economically. We understand that instructor presence and interaction are greatly curtailed in such situations simply because there are only 24 hours in a day and only so much one faculty member can do to teach 100+ students in any kind of interpersonal way. This problem is exacerbated in online settings where interpersonal connection crucially separates an OWC from a self-taught learning model.



7. Reflect.
8. Develop course community/meet one another.
9. Understand/work through course logistics. (p. 52)

We add to that list such tasks as coordinating collaborative activities, completing peer review projects, and sharing finished writing with peers. The term “discussion board” stands in for this myriad of pedagogical purposes all represented with the label, supplanting the name of the LMS tool for what can be a broad range of learning experiences. The student survey reported here and in “A Report on a U.S.-Based National Survey of Students in Online Writing Courses” illuminated the struggle that Writing Studies faces with substituting technology terms for pedagogical practices in OWI. Given such a wide range of uses for discussion boards, we wonder whether instructors might, like some students in this survey, assume the narrower range, reducing a technologically-rich tool for teaching and learning to required drudge work disconnected from student writing.

The same reductionist impulse occurs with “multimedia materials.” In their qualitative responses, students had a wide range of views on slide presentations, podcasts, and videos, but the focus was on the materials themselves and not the purpose for which the materials were created—learning composition in some manner. In fact, despite two pilots of the survey, the OWI student survey working group conflated various types of media under the term “multimedia materials.” The students’ confusion came not necessarily from the clarity of the materials but rather from instructor’s shared fuzziness about the pedagogical purpose. For example, a talking-head introductory video with a screenshare of a course LMS pages serves a different purpose (i.e., orientation to course navigation; see Dockter, 2016) from an annotated or voice-over slide presentations (i.e., presenting an instructional concept or term). A video might introduce students to course concepts, provide instruction on a particular concept or skill, or offer a tutorial on how to use class technology. VOIP technology also allows simple synchronous communication that then can be recorded and viewed multiple times. The description of these delivery modalities demonstrates a need to be more precise in instructional language and in descriptions of how technology use achieves learning outcomes. Both the OWI educators and students suffer confusion when language is imprecise.

**Administrators and instructional designers must provide purposeful-pedagogy training and professional development beyond the traditional teaching practicum course.**

The obvious implication is that OWI (and writing pedagogy more generally) educators need to rethink and reconsider how initially training faculty to teach writing-intensive courses is approached and, more importantly, how to provide ongoing professional development.

With a large number of contingent faculty teaching OWCs, the field can no longer make assumptions about pedagogical practice. Even with master course shells or standardized curricula, all OWI instructors benefit from training and professional development in course delivery, not just course design. We advocate for professional development and training that includes pedagogy-driven course design at its core.

In particular, with so many instructors not having control over their online course shells, program administrators need to be trained in this practice so that the design and content are intimately connected and adhere to the Framework for Purposeful Pedagogy because the standardized “one-size-fits-all” course shell is not serving students nor allowing instructors to teach.

In addition to “ongoing professional development to keep up with new pedagogies and technology” (Melonçon & Harris 2015, p. 422), continuing professional development should focus specifically on how to design courses using purposeful pedagogy “that is transparent. . . , providing clear learning outcomes but also information about how those outcomes will be achieved and what is required of students” (p. 425). Instructors must be trained to explicitly identify the how of the online course in student orientations, which will help them to understand how scaffolded readings, quizzes, assignments, and the like work together to help them improve their writing. At the beginning of online courses, we recommend emphasizing “an overview of the assignments, activities, and requirements in a class” (p. 418). However, educators need to go beyond these “what and how” orientations to include a “why” orientation; furthermore, educators should provide continuing re-orientation that connects the individual units of the course to learning outcomes and reminds students that what they are required to do has explicit purpose. Students need to know why they are asked to do these activities, readings, and assignments and not others. They need to be told why and how one activity or assignment leads to the next. Additionally, when instructors explain “why” the course is constructed as it is, they have the added benefit of better seeing the gaps in the course design, enabling them to realign course learning outcomes, activities, assignments, and assessments.

In short, OWI educators need instructor training that is more robust and directed to OWI as both an environment and a process. Many institutions require faculty to attend some sort of training to teach online, but the “The State of the Art of OWI: Initial Report of CCCC Committee on Best Practices for Online Writing Instruction” (CCCC OWI Committee, 2011) clearly revealed that the majority of that training for OWI instructors is rudimentary technology-based information that tends to follow the Quality Matters rubric, emphasize the LMS or technology, or provide general instructions that may not address the needs of online writing students. In addition to those kinds of technology trainings or orientations, it is important to attend to writing instruction concerns such as Beth L. Hewett and Rebecca Hallman Martini’s (2017) work on using Jungian personality types to design better writing-specific professional development for online instructors (see also Jaramillo-Santoy & Cano-Moreal, 2013; Melonçon, 2017; Melonçon & Arduser, 2013; St.Amant, 2018).

**Administrators and instructional designers must offer professional development that specifically addresses instructor and student displacement in online courses.**

In composing this article, we discussed the results of the OWI Student Survey and asked ourselves: “Where is the teacher in this class?” Despite two pilots and a fully collaborative process engaging multiple experienced OWI educators and outside experts, we managed to construct the survey without interrogating the assumption that “online class” mostly referred to the content in the LMS shell. Looking back at our initial research questions, we focused on the students’ needs and, therefore, the instructor was absent from the questions. Yet, questions such as “What components of online writing classes do students find most helpful in improving their writing?” suggest that the course itself can exist outside of the interactions of the humans involved in it—an assumption that seems ludicrous in relation to face-to-face classes. The instructor needs to be present both in our research questions and in the OWCs themselves. The survey data suggested both that the survey missed this important component and that OWI instructors may be missing from their own courses.

Thus instructors need faculty development that helps them be present and limits instructor and student displacement or the shift away from the humans at the center of the course as “the classroom changes its configuration when it is altered from a traditional course” to an online course (Melonçon, 2009, p. 106). This displacement impacts instructors and students alike, and online course presence is not a skill for which many OWI instructors have been trained (as evidenced by published literature).

Because the instructor can be displaced in the online class simply by not being present in the same physical space as the students, instructors need to learn strategies to put themselves back into the online classrooms, including strategies that help them communicate with students in ways that further elucidate course learning outcomes and the how of the online writing course. In particular, online instructors need to have professional development in writing specifically for the online environment, including (1) how to write effective instructional materials, (2) how to write effective assignments, (3) how to write effective feedback, and (4) how to write in such a way to reduce cognitive load on students in a reading- and writing-heavy medium (Hewett, 2015a; Hewett & Ehmann, 2004).

As Ken Gillam and Shannon Wooten (2013) stated:

The best parts of composition pedagogy are precisely what’s missing in most online learning situations. Indeed, the very characteristics of online learning that make it most attractive in university recruitment campaigns—the convenience of learning outside of real time, the ability to work from home or on the go—are the very things that disembodied learners, separating them physically and temporally from their professors and classmates. (para. 4)

Gillam and Wooten’s statement sheds light on the problem inherent in the Quality Matters rubric and other rubrics that separate design from delivery. In the traditional onsite classroom, the instructor must be—whether he or she ascribes to a decentralized classroom—actively present in the class. In the online classroom, educators seem to discuss the class as if it could stand alone without the instructor. The online class therefore can displace both instructor and student, whose needs are not addressed without an instructor’s presence, making connection and community-building a struggle and reducing the “class” space to the equivalent of an online textbook with activities. There are a number of approaches that can be used in conjunction with the framework for purposeful pedagogy-driven course design such as the community of inquiry (e.g., Stewart, 2018), which focuses on presence for both instructors and students. The OWI Principles document (CCCC OWI Committee, 2013) framed the idea of presence within issues of building community in OWCs. OWI Principle 11 stated that “Online writing teachers and their institutions should develop personalized and interpersonal online communities to foster student success,” and an example practice is to develop a course community. If a teacher walked into a traditional onsite classroom, handed out a textbook and some assignments, and sat silently at the front of the classroom while students read and wrote, Writing Studies educators would be shocked. However, when the equivalent happens in an

OWC, they may shift blame to the students, indicating that students—and not themselves—need to be more active and engaged in the course.

Students can interpret instructor displacement as a lack of caring and support. In a recent study of online students at one southern public university, Glazier and Skurat Harris (2018) analyzed student perceptions of instructor rapport (defined as instructor friendliness, willingness to communicate, and empathy for students) in online classes. They then used predictive modeling based on institutional data on GPA and demographics to prove that moving an average student from a low-rapport class to a high-rapport class improved their chances of passing the course with a C or better by 30%. In university-wide surveys regarding the “best” or “worst” classes students have taken (n=2009), online students identified the instructor as the single factor that contributed the most to their ranking a class as “best” or “worst” (when given the options of interest in the subject, instructor, assignments, personal circumstances). Online students were more likely to identify good instructors as “available” and onsite students were more likely to talk about good instructors as being “friendly or kind.” Qualitative responses in the survey indicated that students wanted clear and relevant content clearly explained. Students desire and need information that they believe will be beneficial to their careers and lives, and they want faculty to explain such information well and assess their own work fairly. The Glazier and Skurat Harris study aligns directly with our student survey, particularly as seen in student comments related to feedback and poorly contextualized readings, discussion boards, and multimedia materials.

**Researchers need to expand OWI research to include more, and more in-depth, accounts of student experiences.**

Melonçon and Harris (2015) originally recommended that the Writing Studies field should conduct more research on the profiles and demographics of students in OWCs (2013, p. 424). While we still support this type of in-class research to help design classes that meet student needs, we refine that recommendation here to say that the field needs more large-scale, across-classes and institutions research about student experiences and needs that is not survey driven and that provides a deeper understanding of the online student experience.

Recent research on writing programs and courses has been critical of the survey (Melonçon, 2018) because of the mismatch between the question/problem being asked/addressed and the survey as a method. However, many questions around pedagogy in online environments require more in-depth information from both teachers and students, which would be better answered from qualitative studies that cross several institutions.

Surveys are a useful method for reaching large numbers of people, and they can then provide valid and reliable data for generalizable claims; indeed, survey research regarding specific questions suited to quantitative results still are needed. However, as the national student survey in OWI has shown, innovative strategies for student recruitment need to be developed.

The data from this student survey strongly indicated that feedback is an important component of OWCs, yet OWI research has too little research in this area. OWI educators need more research on feedback (see Melonçon, 2018) and what that means for OWI. Specifically, OWI scholars know little about the types of feedback currently being used in classes and whether and why the students think it is (un)helpful; more studies of feedback in this context should be a first priority for OWI researchers. It also is important to conduct studies on how peer review is being taught and facilitated, and the effectiveness of peer review on student revision strategies (see Hewett 1998, 2000).

Research regarding online writing course design and delivery should be rigorous and well-conceived. One of the issues that emerges repeatedly regards studies that are unable to be compared and assessed together. More attention must be paid to research study design, which is a “systematic and reflexive approach to designing studies in ways that emphasize the connection and integration between the research question and the chosen methodologies, methods, and practices used to examine a topic . . . with an intense and transparent focus on ethics” (Melonçon, 2018, p. 213; see also Haswell, 2005, regarding the ongoing need for replicable, aggregable, and data-supported [RAD] research). An increased attention to better research study design will produce better research results that are more useful and much needed data for faculty and administrators to increase understanding of OWI. For example, OWI needs studies that examine course design and instructor presence and how they impact student success and retention. OWI research such as this could potentially show the effects of such pedagogical approaches as the use of discussion boards from the variations of how they are used to how they impact learning outcomes would be helpful. Designing a rigorous study regarding discussion boards for OWI purposes likely would involve experimental design involving a type of study that could be ported across institutions; the resultant data would likely provide stronger conclusions on how to effectively engage the discussion board (in its many pedagogical functions) in purposeful pedagogy-driven OWCs.

## Conclusion

We have reported on student concerns regarding their OWCs, and we have connected those concerns to existing OWI literature. In doing so, we exposed a problem with OWC design in that OWI education has not addressed the design of online courses adequately through a pedagogical lens. OWI scholars have discussed the what and why of OWI, but not the how. Purposeful pedagogy-driven course design offers an example of what pedagogy in online courses can look like in practice. Finally, we examined some implications for OWI education as it moves forward with an emphasis on purposeful pedagogy-driven course design.

Much of the student data reported here and in [“A Report on a U.S.-Based National Survey of Students in Online Writing Courses”](#) pointed to a need to help OWI educators make stronger connections among learning outcomes, activities and assignments, readings and materials, and writing and feedback as noted in Figure 1. Program administrators may assume that OWI instructors already know how to teach writing, yet they may not be aware of how such teaching differs in online settings (Hewett, 2015a; Warnock, 2009). However, with high numbers of non-tenure track faculty and graduate students teaching online, these assumptions cannot be made. Administrators must acknowledge the strong connection between faculty preparation and pedagogical approaches, and they should use this connection to encourage and develop purposeful pedagogy-driven course designs for their OWCs. This type of course design and orientation must occur not only at the beginning of the class but also throughout the course to orient students continually to the class and to inform students at each juncture how they can best succeed in the class. In doing so, OWI education can develop better ways to prepare faculty so that students’ concerns raised in the national survey of OWI can be addressed.

One of the most significant aspects of this student survey project is that the results can help OWI instructors add the necessary connections in their pedagogical approaches to more effectively implement the ideas presented in the *OWI Principles* document (CCCC OWI Committee, 2013). As importantly, purposeful pedagogy-driven course design advances research across all of distance education, entering OWI educators into broader conversations about how to teach online more effectively.

The next step for research in purposeful pedagogy-driven course design includes the rigorous studies mentioned in the section on research above. Ideally, researchers will conduct empirical and data drive research studies to determine the effect of instructor presence in purposeful pedagogy-driven course design ideally in multiple courses. Surveys of student perceptions of purposeful pedagogy-driven courses will not suffice. Instead, we have to create research

conditions that allow us to pinpoint how purposeful-pedagogy driven classes most effectively improve student writing.

The opening epigram of this article (*I don't feel that this class has helped me improve my writing*) encouraged the student survey working group and the authors of this article to read the student responses alongside existing research, and we realized that students' views of the OWC circled back to instructor preparedness and institutional support for online teaching. Some of the students essentially were asking, "Where is the instructor in my OWC?" We hope the pedagogical framework provided will begin to answer this question.

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# Tech Reviews

## Affordable Technology Solutions for Literacy Learning through ePortfolios: A Comparison of Google Sites, Weebly, and WordPress

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### ePortfolios and Literacy Learning

Recently, the AAC&U added eportfolio pedagogy as a high impact practice (Batson et al., 2017). There is a large body of work examining eportfolios' ability to support metacognition and identity negotiation (e.g. Eynon, Gambino, and Kuh, 2017; Jenson 2011; Peet et al. 2011). However, not all institutions have the funding to purchase an application to try this pedagogy. Using free versions of applications to create online websites is a good way to become familiar with this practice in a low stakes way. Different applications have varying levels of complexity, such as how many levels of menus are needed for editing, whether there are drag and drop design elements, or what media formats are available to embed or link to within the editing mode. As a result, instructors need to choose online applications appropriate to their own technology skills as well as the technology skills of their students. To create an effective eportfolio using a free website creation application, one needs the ability to create a navigation



menu, pages with subpages, and multimedia objects. This technology review discusses three popular, free website applications for creating literacy learning eportfolios: Google Sites, Weebly, and WordPress. We will compare the applications for literacy learning, ease of use, and possible challenges and concerns.

Bret Eynon, Laura M. Gambino, and George Kuh (2017) argue that eportfolios are a high impact practice because they can support student success and can encourage reflective, integrative, deep learning. As a high impact practice, eportfolios have the potential to be powerful spaces for literacy learning. Charles Bazerman (2016) suggested that in order for students to develop more fully as writers, they need to engage in writing opportunities outside of the classroom that require them to work through problem-solving activities. Eportfolios can be public documents, available on the web, and therefore available to different audiences. Students can make sites designed for these audiences and use social media to draw the audience to their work.

Developing a similar line of thinking, Elizabeth Wardle and Kevin Roozen (2012) described what they saw as “vertical” and “horizontal” models of literacy development to arrive at their “ecological” model of writing. They pointed out that most writing assessment has a “monocontextual view of literacy development that privileges school settings and growing expertise in school settings” (p. 108). Horizontal models of literacy development track the simultaneous literate activities in which students engage. In contrast, an ecological view of writing looks at “an individual’s writing abilities as developing across an expansive network that links together a broad range of literate experiences over lengthy periods of time” (Wardle & Roozen, 2012, p. 108). ePortfolios allow students to document what Wardle and Roozen are calling the “broad range of literate experiences” (p. 108). This work of connecting is achieved through creating a digital space where pieces of writing can create context for each other: a research paper can be juxtaposed with a related reflection, infographic, and multimedia presentation. In order to support literacy learning, eportfolios must be more than a “repository of work; an eportfolio should be a student-centered collection of work that supports deeper learning and self-reflection” (Oehlman et al., 2016, p. 13).

ePortfolios can be used to structure a learning environment that supports students’ literacy development. To achieve the promise of eportfolios for literacy learning, students must engage in creating learning eportfolios that support their development as writers. Elizabeth Meyer et al. (2008) described what they call “process eportfolios” as a means to scaffold “knowledge construction by supporting reflection, refinement, conferencing, and other processes of self-

regulation, important skills for life-long learning and learning how to learn” (p. 85). Similarly, Jill D. Jenson and Paul Treuer (2014) identified five levels of thinking needed so eportfolios can be used as “learning tools”:

1. Collecting relevant artifacts that document learning.
2. Self-regulation to become aware of and exercise behavior that leads to learning.
3. Critical reflection by contextualizing the meaning and significance of their learning in terms of established goals and values systems.
4. Integrating their learning [through] synthesizing their experiences and transferring them to new situations.
5. Collaboration by building upon their existing knowledge and applying it in a community with others. (p. 53)

Each of these levels builds upon the previous one in increasing intellectual difficulty. Instructors need to think through how each level is presented and built upon as they work through their course.

In order to be able to realize these benefits of eportfolios, instructors and students must face the technological requirements that come with the “e” of eportfolios. There are various web-site applications that facilitate the creation of eportfolios. Table 1 (ePortfolio Applications and Five Levels of Thinking) illustrates how Google Sites, Weebly, and WordPress facilitate the five levels of thinking identified by Jenson and Treuer.

Table 1. ePortfolio Applications and Five Levels of Thinking

Level of Thinking	Google Sites	Weebly	WordPress
<b>Collection</b>	Students can add documents from their Google Drive. To upload a video, students must first make it available in YouTube. Students can upload graphics that have been saved in Google Drive.	Students can upload documents through Scribd and as file attachments. To upload a video, students must first make it available in YouTube.  Students can upload graphics directly.	Students can upload documents as file attachments Students can embed videos using HTML code.  They can upload graphics directly.

<b>Self-Regulation</b>	Most students are able to quickly understand and use Google Sites so they are able to focus on course goals rather than web design.	Some students find it difficult to learn how to use Weebly, so some class time will be needed to show students how to document their learning. This time to learn the application may make it more difficult to develop self-regulation skills.	The interface requires more dedicated time to learn as it is the most difficult of the applications for students to learn. It is less intuitive for novice users and so requires a lot of instructional time to master, which will take time away from opportunities for novice students to develop self-regulatory behaviors associated with eportfolios.
<b>Critical Reflection</b>	There is space throughout the portfolio for students to reflect on works in progress as well as opportunity to review that writing for the end of term reflection.	The application allows dedicated blog pages that automatically organize blog postings for organizing student reflections.	The application allows dedicated blog pages that automatically organize blog postings for organizing student reflections.
<b>Integrative Learning</b>	Students can link pages to each other to show relationships between projects.	Students can link pages to each other to show relationships between projects.	Students can link pages to each other to show relationships between projects.
<b>Collaboration</b>	Students can peer review through sharing documents in Google Drive.  The portfolio can be shared with others outside the course when the comment function is made available.	Students can use a comment function available for peer review.  Survey templates are also available that can be used for peer review.	Students can use the comment function for peer review.

Table 1 shows how each eportfolio application can be used to help students collect artifacts to demonstrate their learning. ePortfolios provide a space for self-regulatory behaviors when they are used consistently throughout a course. Applications that are easy to learn and create can better support self-regulation. ePortfolios also provide a space for students to reflect on their learning by juxtaposing the artifact with the relevant reflective writing. In addition, ePortfolios enable students to document how they use literacy concepts and processes across courses. Students can post artifacts from other writing situations to demonstrate how they transfer their literacy across contexts. Finally, students are able to collaborate in the construction of their eportfolios through application features such as comments and site sharing.

### **The Technology of ePortfolios**

There are many private vendors of eportfolio software products that facilitate the use of eportfolios, such as Digication or PebblePad. However, before committing to a vendor, or if one does not have sufficient funding for a campus-wide system, one might experiment with free web-site applications.

Frequently used free applications include the newest version of Google Sites (<http://sites.google.com>), Weebly (<http://weebly.com>), and WordPress (<http://wordpress.com>). The upgraded Google Sites, formally called “New Google Sites” in contrast to the “Classic Google Sites” (which is being phased out) is a Google-based application that is very easy to use due to its drag-and-drop design elements and integration with Google Drive. It is a good application to begin with for users new to eportfolios or for students who may not have an extensive background in computer usage. Google Sites requires a Google account to login, and it interfaces easily with other Google products such as Google Drive and YouTube. There are basic privacy settings that limit sharing and search engine visibility, and users can upload graphics that are located in Google Drive as well as easily embed YouTube videos on the webpages. The navigation is now drag-and-drop, and the banners are more sophisticated than in older versions of Google Sites. There is an extensive, official support database to help students and teachers when working with the application, and there are many user-generated “how to” videos on YouTube. The limitations of Google Sites are related to its simplicity: customization is limited, pages cannot be individually password protected, and the URL will always be long.

Weebly is another popular application that has a few more features available than Google Sites. It is fairly easy to use as it is based on drag-and-drop editing, although novice users may need help with the various editing menus. There is a range of specialized pages, such as a blog page or a gallery page, and the banners can be customized for each page. Students can begin the eportfolio-building process from a wide range of templates. Pages can be password protected or hidden from search engines should a student desire privacy for a piece of writing. Additionally, like Google Sites, Weebly automatically adjusts for mobile devices and offers a preview option for different devices in the editing view. In the free version, one can embed videos, but in the pro version available for a fee, there are more embedding and linking options. Also, with the pro version, one can have a streamlined URL for the site. Users can email or chat for help in the free version, but there is phone help with the pro version. The limitations of Weebly are that the learning curve is a little steeper than Google Sites, and one must pay for the pro version for more advanced options, but students can build a functional eportfolio quite well with the free version.

WordPress has been very popular with bloggers for many years, and about a third of personal websites are made through WordPress, based on surveys of content management usage (W3Techs Web Technology Survey, 2019). It can be extensively customized, but with that flexibility comes a slightly more complex user editing interface. With an experienced coach, beginning web users can successfully build a basic WordPress site, but the interface might be easier to learn quickly for users more experienced with website building and coding. A student can password protect sites or pages. Multimedia can be easily uploaded and embedded, and there is extensive support through the WordPress help site. However, one must upgrade to the premium version for more options and services such as a wider range of interactive page themes, media embedding, and developer support. An additional limitation is that one may need to add a plug-in (software added onto an application to increase its functions) to make a WordPress site easy to use on mobile devices. For example, Brian Jackson (2018), writing for a WordPress hosting site, reviews several plug-ins that WordPress users might use for mobile devices. However, a student creating a WordPress site for a classroom learning portfolio may not need this capability

In general, Google Sites is good for beginners, Weebly for intermediate users, and WordPress for more advanced users. Nevertheless, beginners and advanced student users can create excellent eportfolios for programs or courses using any of these popular applications with good guidance. Instructors new to eportfolios might begin with Google Sites or Weebly, depending on their comfort learning new applications. We recommend that an instructor have

a sample site built before class begins in order to work through the technical requirements being asked of students as well as providing a sample of what the final site will look like for the students. In Table 2. (Technology Summary), we offer a description of the technical considerations for selecting an eportfolio application.

Table 2. Technology Summary

<b>Technical Considerations :</b>	<b>Google Sites</b>	<b>Weebly</b>	<b>WordPress</b>
<b>Accessibility</b>	As a Google product, Google Sites works best with Chrome as the internet browser. Students with Internet Explorer as their only option will not be able to access the functionality found in "New Google Sites." Google Sites allows for viewing on different types of devices such as phones, tablets, and computers.	Weebly is easily accessed from any internet browser. Like Google Sites, it allows for viewing on different types of devices such as phones, tablets, and computers.	WordPress is easily accessed from any internet browser. Unlike Google Sites or Weebly, WordPress requires a plug-in to view across different devices.
<b>Page Types</b>	The pages are simple with drop-down subpage menus. There are a limited number of templates to design pages.	The pages are simple with blog pages and drop-down subpage menu options. There is a wide choice of templates to design pages.	The pages are simple with blog pages and drop-down subpage menu options. There is an extensive choice of templates, some free and some for a fee.
<b>Privacy Settings</b>	Sites can be made private or shared. The site can be hidden from search engines.	Sites can be password protected or hidden from search engines.	Sites or select pages can be password protected or hidden.

<b>Multimedia</b>	Students can import from YouTube and Google Drive files.	Students can import from YouTube and upload graphics and files.	In the free version, students embed code from YouTube videos and can upload graphics and files.
<b>Support</b>	Official knowledge base containing how-to articles as well as many YouTube user videos are available.	Phone, live chat & email support, and a good library of support articles are available.	Many user blogs, YouTube Channels and forums are available, but there is no phone number or email for help.

Accessibility often depends more on a browser's capabilities to interact with web content than the application. Chrome (Google Chrome Help, 2017) is a Google product, so Google Sites interacts best through Chrome. Chrome offers extensions that allows users to navigate using the keyboard, adjust webpage colors, adjust or remove colors, see existing alt text, and create long descriptions. Firefox (Mozilla Support, 2017) offers many functions to increase accessibility such as using a keyboard, mouse shortcuts, zooming features, and compatibility with screen readers. Similar to Firefox, Explorer (Microsoft Support, 2017) offers functions such as using a keyboard and zooming, as well as screen reader and voice recognition options. How the design appears across different devices depends on the application. As noted above, Google Sites and Weebly provide specific views for different devices although WordPress requires a plug-in. The only browser that causes difficulties is Internet Explorer. For example, as of 2019, Internet Explorer will allow viewing a Google Site, but when attempting to go to <http://sites.google.com>, the browser window that come up reads, "To create or edit a site, open the new Google Sites with [Chrome](#), [Firefox](#) or [Safari](#), or use [Classic Sites](#)."

In addition to having the browser capabilities, all three applications also offer some accessibility features for the user building the site. Google Sites (Google, 2017) allows keyboard navigation and is compatible with screen readers. Weebly (Ckimbaravosky, 2018) remains dependent on browser accessibility and does not offer special accessibility options for editing. WordPress (WordPress Codex, 2017) does offer accessibility functions, but they are dependent on coding knowledge so that for more novice users, one remains dependent on the browser for accessibility.

## FERPA Compliance

Because an eportfolio in these free applications is often publicly available on the web, there may be concerns about privacy and consent. FERPA is the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974. It is a federal law that protects the privacy of students' educational records and guarantees students' access to their own records. Educational records include test forms, school evaluations, and complaints. School work, such as the work posted in an eportfolio, is not a formal student record, but any grades associated with that featured work are considered part of a student's record. The case of *Owasso Independent School District v. Falvo* went before the U.S. Supreme Court to determine if peer grading violated FERPA since the student work being peer reviewed might be seen as an educational record. However, the court ruled that peer grading does not violate FERPA, noting that peer reviewers "did not constitute a person acting for an educational institution within FERPA" ("*Owasso Independent School District No. I-011v Falvo*"). Thus, we recommend not having any formal assessments be completed on the eportfolio. Assessment activity should remain behind the firewall of the learning management system in order to be compliant with FERPA regulations. Having a public eportfolio is also a valuable teachable moment in discussing what it means to put materials on the web and the nature of digital privacy.

Nevertheless, some institutions, such as the University of Oregon, ask students to sign a "Consent for Disclosure of Education Record: ePortfolio Participation." This "Consent for Disclosure" is intended to be a formal release of an eportfolio as an educational record, which is available for others to see, such as by other students during peer review. Marisa Ramirez and Gail MacMillan (2010) note that FERPA compliance is murky when it comes to eportfolios, and they explain that the problem hinges on the public nature of the material in eportfolios. They suggest that it is important for students to be fully aware of the public nature of work published on the web. This awareness can be through a class discussion, a syllabus statement, and a written reflection by the students on the front page of the portfolio that discusses how the public nature of the eportfolio affects the writing process.

## Conclusion

ePortfolios can help students improve their literacy learning and reflective metacognition as well as facilitate holistic assessment at many levels (e.g. Batson et al., 2017, Bokser et al, 2016; Miller and Morgaine, 2009). ePortfolios provide the opportunity to develop a more expansive definition of literacy and literacy learning that includes self-regulated learning, metacognitive/reflective learning, multiliteracies, and self-identity (e.g. Eynon, Gambino and Török).



ePortfolios allow students the opportunity to identify their own goals for literacy learning (e.g. Acker and Halasek, 2008; Light, Chen and Ittelson, 2012). Composing in this digital, public environment creates an opportunity for students to present themselves and to document the development of their academic/professional identities (e.g. Oehlman et al., 2016). Using free applications, such as Google Sites, Weebly, and WordPress can be a good way to start experimenting with eportfolios. These applications offer different levels of usability that instructors can choose from to best fit the needs of their students. While the technology may seem to be a significant part of the eportfolio experience, once a user is familiar with the basic functions, the benefits of using eportfolios for literacy learning become clear as the key element of this high impact practice.

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## Enriching Online Discussions with VoiceThread

**Lauren Salisbury**

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### Introduction

One of the most prevalent challenges we face as online instructors is encouraging interactivity and personal contact in the online learning environment (OLE). Because OLEs often rely on text-based interactions hosted in learning management systems (LMSs) like Blackboard and Canvas, instructors often perceive a “presumption of loss” (Blair, 2010, p. 72) associated with online learning that makes it “less desirable” (Hewett, 2015, p. 2) and lacking in interactivity. Though there are ways to create more interactive opportunities for discussion, doing so can be cumbersome and labor intensive for instructors and require students to use unfamiliar software applications that may or may not integrate with the institutional LMS. Teaching entry-level literacy courses like first-year writing and developmental or college reading can be made even more difficult by these challenges.

In this review, I suggest the online presentation software VoiceThread offers a potential solution for instructors who want to see and hear their students while also avoiding recreating all their course content. Although VoiceThread cannot meet the needs of every online course, it does offer a unique platform for instructors who want to increase interactivity between students and simplify or consolidate the platforms and technologies they already use in their courses. For online instructors teaching literacy education, VoiceThread is a strong way to encourage more meaningful discussion and enhance existing course projects.

### Using VoiceThread in an Online Course

VoiceThread is a cloud application that allows users to share media and host discussions in a series of slides like a PowerPoint presentation. What makes VoiceThread unique is the way it allows users to create presentations that integrate narration and comments from both creators and audience members. VoiceThread users can create lectures, discussions, and resources to facilitate online courses or even supplement face-to-face and hybrid courses online. Designed for K-12, higher education, and business use, VoiceThread allows users to upload presentation slides, documents, images, videos, and audio files to one location that they can then share with their audience. Creators and audience members, like instructors and students for example, can comment on individual slides with text, audio, video, and file uploads. Users can return to the VoiceThread at any time and add comments and questions to keep the discussion going asynchronously.

To compose a VoiceThread, users upload media directly to the application website using the “Create” button. Instructors can, for example, upload existing PowerPoints, PDFs, images, videos, and audio files and organize them in the VoiceThread by dragging and dropping individual icons around the screen similar to how you might organize a PowerPoint in the “Slide Sorter” view. Instructors or other creators can then comment on individual slides through text, audio, video, or file uploads to give commentary, add context, or ask questions alongside the slide content. Once instructors share the VoiceThread, either by copying and pasting the sharing link or embedding the VoiceThread in their course site, students can add comments of their own to respond to discussion questions, reply to their colleagues, or ask questions on any slide in the presentation. Instructors and students can start public comment threads by posting new public comments publicly or privately replying to existing comments. Each VoiceThread can then become not only a lecture, but also an expansive space for discussion where students and instructors can participate using the same tools.

Since VoiceThread allows users to communicate through multiple modalities including audio and video, instructors and students can interact in ways that more closely mimic face-to-face courses and encourage repeated and deeper conversations than text-heavy discussion boards, typically found in LMSs like Blackboard and Canvas. For online writing and reading courses, especially, VoiceThread can encourage students to experiment with composing and reading multiple modes of communication. It also allows students to interact in the modes with which they are most comfortable. In both the writing and reading courses that I have taught using VoiceThread, I have left this option up to the students. Sometimes, students choose to participate exclusively through video commenting, especially in courses that are writing

intensive already. Other students appreciate the chance to type out shorter responses to questions and take part more often through text comments. An advantage to VoiceThread is that students can meaningfully participate with or without a webcam and can express their thoughts through alphabetic text, audio, or video.

One of the most obvious ways that VoiceThread expands the possibilities of online instruction is through the ability to see and hear students and be seen and heard by students. I have taught both online first-year writing courses (OFYWCs) and online developmental reading courses using VoiceThread in the challenging summer semester when students are often juggling summer jobs, vacations, and other courses both face-to-face and online. In these courses, instructors have between six and eight weeks to get to know their students and can typically do so only through the institutional LMS, email, and the projects students turn in. Almost all of these interactions are text-based and are often questions about assignment requirements or requests for extensions. Shifting away from the exclusive use of the LMS toward VoiceThread integration for facilitating course content and discussion offered the chance for me to see my students and interact with them using text, audio, and video. I could see many of my students weekly through their video comments and hear from students who might otherwise not have contacted me individually. VoiceThread can increase the amount of instructor-student and student-student contact and even eliminate the need for separate lecture videos and discussion boards in the LMS.

When integrating VoiceThread into my courses, I created one VoiceThread presentation for each week of the semester, similar to my earlier method of creating a video lecture for each week. I embedded each VoiceThread in a corresponding module within the LMS (e.g. "Week 1 VoiceThread" was included in the "Week 1: Introduction to the Course" module). Immediately, my process for creating weekly content changed because I realized I could speak directly to my students in the VoiceThread and expect them to respond. Instead of a lecture-style video, I could create these slides as conversation starters and avenues to reflections, questions, and discussion. I quickly adopted a format that introduced course concepts but also dedicated specific slides to questions and discussions. Because the technology was new to my students, I repeatedly reminded them--in comments and slide content--of the possibilities, including the idea that they could comment anywhere in the VoiceThread, ask questions, and discuss content even when I did not specifically ask for them to respond. Reminders like this eventually prompted students to ask questions and comment on slides on which I had not directly asked for feedback, and I heard from more students on VoiceThread slides than I did through email or the LMS messaging tool. Though many students only commented the required three times

each week, over half of them consistently commented more than three times, whether to ask a question, respond to a colleague, or offer another example.



[Voicethread available here](#)

[Transcript of VoiceThread available here](#)

### Training and Support

There are multiple options for training and support for instructors learning to use VoiceThread. Users can find short tutorials on the company's user homepage that include information on creating a new VoiceThread, commenting, doodling, moderating comments, and sharing VoiceThreads. The application website also hosts multiple workshops that include the basic skills needed to start using the tool (e.g. "upload, comment and share"; "VoiceThread and your LMS") and targeted options for designing online courses (e.g. "Humanize Your Online Course with VoiceThread"). These workshops are designed and hosted in VoiceThread presentation format and are archived on the application website under "Training" for users to access asynchronously. There are also workshops on applying different teaching styles (e.g. "Game Based Learning and VoiceThread") and teaching specific content areas (e.g. "VoiceThread for Nursing Educators"; "Teaching Languages with VoiceThread"), though there are no specific workshops for teaching writing or reading with VoiceThread. Many of the basic-skill workshop topics are archived in the over forty YouTube videos available on the VoiceThread channel. In addition to these targeted workshops, instructors can earn a VoiceThread Certification by completing a two-week online training course and capstone



project. VoiceThread also hosts a growing digital library of resources and completed VoiceThreads, though most existing files in the database are designed for K-12 teachers.

### **Cost**

Instructors can use VoiceThread for free, but there are limitations on available features and storage in the no-cost version of the application. As of the writing of this review, users of the free version will be unable to create threaded comments and can only create four VoiceThreads before they are prompted to purchase more. Instructors can buy three additional VoiceThreads for \$4.99. Users can create more than one account if they have a new unique email address, but they cannot combine accounts or view VoiceThreads across multiple accounts at the same time.

VoiceThread will work best for instructors who are at institutions with existing licenses for VoiceThread or who are able to ask for funding for new licenses. Licenses can be purchased for a single instructor or for site-wide use. Institutions can request quotes from VoiceThread for site-wide licenses while single instructors can buy licenses for one class of up to fifty students for \$99. This license expires after one year, meaning students will lose access to existing VoiceThreads in that course. Instructors will also need to buy access for more students at \$2 each.

While the licensure is potentially cost-prohibitive, especially for adjunct instructors and graduate teaching assistants whose institutions do not offer access, paid access does come with added benefits including the ability to moderate all comments made on each VoiceThread. Site licenses also allow instructors to create a custom homepage within VoiceThread that students can use to access all course VoiceThreads. Instructors using site licenses can also create groups within that VoiceThread homepage. Instructors might want to create a group for each course since they can easily add and remove members manually for students enrolling or dropping the course, customize commenting and editing capabilities for users, and add administrators for courses where they have a co-teacher or teaching assistant. Instructor-administrators can even create sub-groups within their larger course groups for facilitating small group discussions, projects, or other activities. These sub-groups can create and share VoiceThreads of their own, meaning instructors could ask students to lead small discussions, present on individual projects or papers for peer feedback, or collaborate on VoiceThreads. Administrators of site licenses can require encrypted connections and have added security available including session timeout control and preventing password autocomplete to keep student information private.



## Accessibility

VoiceThread's integration of multiple mediums including text, audio, and video commenting allows online course communities some of the immediacy and intimacy that critics of online learning argue is lost in translation. VoiceThread offers users multiple points of access, both in terms of how they can participate on VoiceThread presentations and where and how they can view VoiceThreads. These options make it easy for students to choose how they want to be seen and heard in VoiceThread lessons and discussions. Instructors also have the chance to convey information in several modes, meaning they can reach both students who learn best through audio or video and students who learn by reading alphabetic text.

Although VoiceThread can address and respond to what Ehmann and Hewett (2015) call "essential questions as to what distinguishes OWI from composition instruction and learning onsite," including "the loss of real-time body/face/voice connections" and perceived inferiority of online courses (Gillam & Wooden, 2013), it still has many accessibility limitations. Specifically, although VoiceThread allows students and instructors to be seen and heard, audio and video functions--in addition to limited free use of the application--complicate the instructor's ability to ensure accessible content and discussion for all students. Although there are limitations to VoiceThread's accessibility, there are multiple features available to instructors to create more accessible slides for their students.

According to their website, Universal Design principles guide VoiceThread's application design. These principles are most notably seen in VoiceThread Universal, a version of the application that can be used with screen readers. VoiceThread Universal can only be used on the application website, but users can find a link to this version of the tool in the mobile application. Screen reader users can open existing VoiceThread presentations in VoiceThread Universal and have all text comments, captions, and tags read to them. Instructor-creators should note that VoiceThread slides are image files so, without alternative text tags, students using VoiceThread Universal will not be able to access their content. Instructors might compensate for this weakness by adding descriptions of the slide image content in a text comment on the slide.

VoiceThread users can easily add captions to slides and comments by uploading caption files to the presentation. The program supports DFXP, SRT, SAMI, SBV, and SCC file types and allows users to upload, download, and remove caption files at any time, even after they have shared the VoiceThread. Instructors can add captions to their initial commentary and any

follow-up comments they make on the slides. Students can also add captions to their comments; however, they may not be aware of this feature or how to use it without directed instruction. They are also less likely to spend the time captioning their comments unless it's required by their instructor.

### **Mobility**

While VoiceThread can be accessed on desktops and laptops, the application is also available on both Android and iPhone operating systems. The VoiceThread app allows users to register for a new account or log in to an existing one and view, comment on, create, and edit VoiceThreads. Users can upload media from their devices to VoiceThreads and edit VoiceThread content and metadata just as they might on the application website. Students using the mobile app can record video, audio, and text comments on their devices, meaning they can not only easily contribute to conversation no matter where they are physically, but they can also use the tools most familiar or comfortable to them. The application works on both Wi-Fi and data, further expanding when and where users can access their course materials and discussions.

### **Incorporating VoiceThread in an Online Reading Course**

VoiceThread can expand the possibilities for any online course but can be especially helpful to instructors teaching first-year writing and developmental reading courses. A challenge to teaching these entry-level courses online is the way that the writing and reading communities that instructors try to facilitate become less visible and more fractured. Assignments and projects that work well in the face-to-face classroom might fall short of meeting the needs and expectations of online students, especially those in accelerated course sections.

One advantage to using VoiceThread for content delivery and discussion is the way it mimics a face-to-face class session's ebb and flow: lecture and discussion can happen simultaneously, with students adding questions and comments as well as responding to one another at any point in the slides. Students can view these slides in the order designed by the instructor, but can also navigate in a nonlinear fashion, meaning they can return to different slides and conversations without having to review a long video lecture or to find a specific comment in a recorded discussion. This ability to read linearly and nonlinearly is important for students to develop brain plasticity and adapt to the different ways that they must "read, think, and write critically" (Hewett, 2015, p. 53).

VoiceThread slides also “chunk” into smaller and shorter moments, which mimics a reading technique often taught to developmental readers learning to manage academic content. It is important to remember, as Hewett (2015) notes, that reading is the most prevalent accessibility challenge for online students (p. 66), meaning it is important to not only teach students strategies for reading but also demonstrate those strategies in teaching methods we use. Strategies like rereading can be encouraged or even designed as part of the VoiceThread format by duplicating slides or prompting students to return to specified slides and comments.

Instructors can likewise ask students to show these techniques in activities hosted in the VoiceThread slides. Hewett (2015) offers many strong examples for assignments and activities in *Reading to Learn* and *Writing to Teach* that would work well in VoiceThread. One of the underlying principles of these activities is practice-based reading where students demonstrate strategies and techniques for reading. Hewett suggests activities that many of us who teach reading ask face-to-face students to do, like annotating readings and reading aloud. These activities are harder to do, or at least come with the need for more technological intervention, in the online environment. In the VoiceThread, however, students could create video or audio comments where they read aloud to their peers, eliminating the need for additional tools like Skype or Jing. Students can also use these comments to reflect and describe their state of mind when reading to encourage the application of metacognition (Hewett, 2015, p. 106). VoiceThread even seems to combine the elements that Hewett argues best drive home the idea of metacognition. She suggests instructors in the online setting convey the abstract idea of metacognition using concrete images combined with audio and video commentary to explain the relationship between the abstract and the concrete (p. 109). Students can reply to that commentary using text but also audio or video if it is challenging for them to use writing in this way.

We can use images and commentary similarly when talking through annotation. Instructors can create discrete slides that point to passages in a text that have been skillfully annotated, use the comment function to talk through these annotations, and ask students to respond to what they see and hear. Students could follow up by creating their own VoiceThreads that show how they annotated specific passages in a text and by asking their peers to comment on and ask questions about their annotation.

One of the greatest strengths of VoiceThread is the way it encourages this process of discussion and questioning. For students learning to read academic texts and think like college students, teaching and encouraging questioning can be difficult, especially in an online

environment where the opportunities to ask questions might be limited. VoiceThread slides give students the opportunity to interject and ask questions throughout the presentation, making it easier for students to take ownership of the lesson and think critically about the content. Still, it is important that students are given specific opportunities to ask and practice forming questions in the online learning environment (Hewett, 2015, p. 134). Instructors can encourage this practice in VoiceThread slides by creating question-asking intermissions or specific slides dedicated to discussion after a few slides that are content-focused. Students will still ask questions and interject on content-slides, but will feel more encouraged to take part in these conversations if specifically asked and given the space to do so.

### Conclusion

VoiceThread offers online instructors the chance to interact with and offer feedback to students in multiple modalities through a single application. While converting existing content or creating new materials for VoiceThread might initially require time and labor from instructors, that process can save instructors time later as they reuse, edit, and adapt existing VoiceThreads. Instructors must use the application critically and with attention to potential accessibility issues for students who use screen readers and cannot view or listen to video and audio comments. Though accessibility issues do still exist, VoiceThread has made concerted efforts in the past few years to develop the application through user-centered design practices and the creation of VoiceThread Universal, suggesting the application will continue to evolve. Instructors struggling to or wanting to integrate new applications but who are required or encouraged to use their institutional LMS can use that course site as an entry point by linking or embedding VoiceThread on existing course pages and modules. VoiceThread can help instructors design teaching and learning environments that are equitable, technologically equal, and flexible (CCCC OWI Principle 1) and can expand the possibilities for what online instruction looks like.

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# Book Reviews

## Keeping Up with Emerging Technologies: Best Practices for Information Professionals



[A] succinct yet comprehensive overview of techniques and tools useful for staying abreast of new developments in the world of technology.

**Remington Jones** is a software developer, professional writer and copyeditor, and avid reader. He has over 10 years of experience in technology-related fields and holds a Bachelor's in English with a double-minor in computer science and computer information systems.

### Keeping Up with Emerging Technologies: Best Practices for Information Professionals

Nicole Hennig. 2017. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO. [ISBN 978-1-4408-5440-8. 177 pages, including index. US\$50.00 (softcover)].

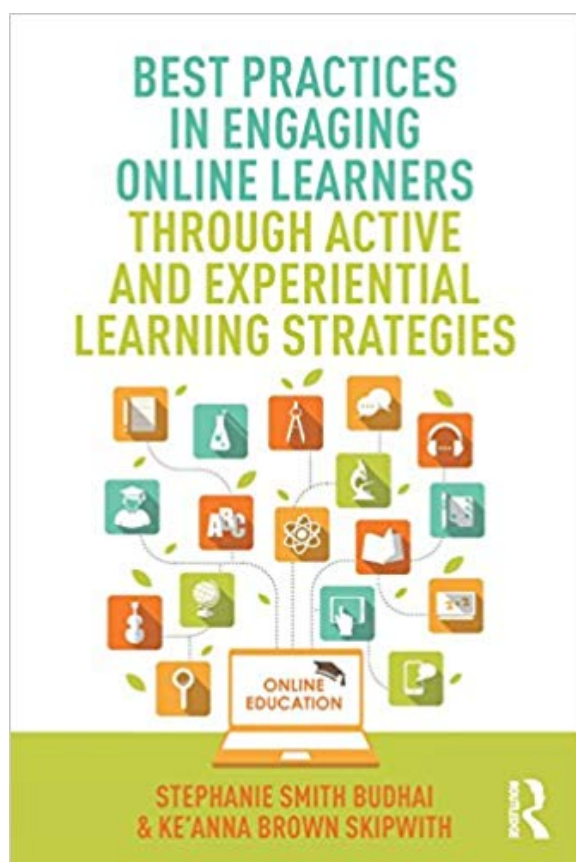
*Keeping Up with Emerging Technologies: A Standards-Based Guide* provides a succinct yet comprehensive overview of techniques and tools useful for staying abreast of new developments in the world of technology. The author, Nicole Hennig, incorporates lessons learned while working at MIT Libraries with interdisciplinary experts and information from academic resources to provide tried-and-true real-world methods for staying informed and integrating new technologies into your workplace.

The bulk of the book is devoted to presenting abstract descriptions of the strategies and tools Hennig recommends, coupled with specific concrete examples of each. This is the best possible approach: not only does it ensure the reader understands exactly what is recommended, it “future-proofs” the book against changes in the technology landscape. For example, Feedly might not be around forever, but some type of RSS-based news aggregation tool almost certainly will be, and Hennig’s advice can apply to any of them, now or in the future. For the time being, all the specific resources discussed throughout the book—books, articles, software, websites, mobile apps—are collected in the final chapter for quick reference without having to re-skim chapters or hunt through the index. This “resource guide” is organized by area of interest or goal: how to skim text, retain information, and deal with change; how to learn from popular culture, science fiction, trend reports, and development strategies; how to persuade people, present information, and hire employees; and how to think about ethics, diversity, accessibility, and user experience during your work—among others.

Perhaps the book’s only major failing is that it actually manages to sell itself short: it’s targeted towards the niche field of “information professionals” like librarians, archivists, and records managers. Despite Hennig’s frequent exhortations to borrow from other fields—in the section on implementing new technologies, for example, she introduces the Agile software development methodology as possible inspiration—she never seems to make the connection that her advice could be useful far beyond the confines of a library. It’s not an exaggeration to say that nearly anyone in the modern world could benefit from at least some of the ideas presented in the book, and for anyone in a technology-focused field, it’s filled with nearly invaluable advice. The book is so thorough, even someone who considers themselves well-versed in the cutting edge of technology would likely find new avenues to explore and new ways to distill knowledge from the endless sea of information we find ourselves adrift in every day.



## Best Practices in Engaging Online Learners Through Active and Experiential Learning Strategies



[O]ffers the next steps in the discussion of online learning, addressing such topics as gamification and social media, experiential learning, and project and scenario-based learning.

**Kurtis Clements** is an assistant professor of interdisciplinary studies at Saint Joseph's College of Maine. He has been teaching writing and literature courses since 1993 and has been involved in online higher education for over 20 years.

### ***Best Practices in Engaging Online Learners Through Active and Experiential Learning Strategies.***

Stephanie Smith Budhai and Ke'Anna Brown Skipwith. 2017. New York, NY: Routledge. [ISBN 978-1-138-67068-6. 100 pages including index, US\$36.95 (softcover).]



Stephanie Smith Budhai and Ke'Anna Brown Skipwith's *Best Practices in Engaging Online Learners Through Active and Experiential Learning Strategies* is a thoughtful and useful book for online educators and instructional designers. The book discusses some familiar territory for those already ensconced in online teaching or course development, but it also offers the next steps in the discussion of online learning, addressing such topics as gamification and social media, experiential learning, and project and scenario-based learning. The book is a quick read with short chapters and an almost "greatest hits" kind of glossing of the chapter topics in the sense that as a reader I found myself craving more information. At the same time, however, the book does provide guidance and excellent suggestions for enhancing the learner experience in the online classroom, so the book is certainly worth reading.

The text is conveniently organized in six chapters. One particularly good chapter discusses assessment, chiefly in terms of assessing active and varied assignments. While instructional designers may push for "creative" and technologically-based assignments, many online instructors are challenged by assessing work that is not in the form of tests, quizzes, or essays. Budhai and Skipwith provide terrific examples of different ways to assess learners to include the nomenclature used (e.g., reading check versus quiz), portfolios, self-assessments, role playing, and field interviews. In many instances, faculty are hesitant to stray too far from what they are accustomed to because they are unsure of how to assess varied assignments or what tools are available. Additionally, the chapter provides information on actual assessment tools, such as Google Forms, Survey Monkey, VoiceThread, and Interactive Rubrics, making it easy for those interested to follow up accordingly.

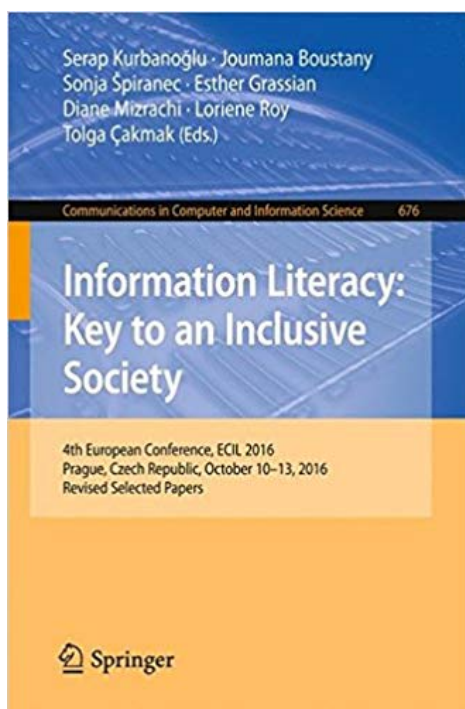
What I appreciated most in the book were the ideas presented that helped to set the stage for implementation. For example, in Chapter 5, the authors discuss ways to build social presence so that learners had ample opportunities to engage with course concepts and have meaningful experiences interacting with each other. To this end, the authors discuss the notion of a group project involving multiple students, which poses challenges not only for the students who largely work asynchronously but also for the instructors who have to manage, support, and assess such work. Budhai and Skipwith provide the blue print for implementing such a project in one's course and discuss such considerations as the design, providing feedback, technology tools, communication, sharing materials, and presenting. Though the discussion of each part is fairly brief, there is still enough information provided that an instructor would have guidance and direction in creating such a collaborative project.



The book does have moments where clunky writing and awkward phrasing distract the reader from the content. I had to wonder at times to what degree the text had been read for clarity of expression as there are some sentences that hit off notes and should have been easy to catch. At other times, the discussion was rather thin and may not be substantive enough for some readers. However, despite these shortcomings, *Best Practices in Engaging Online Learners Through Active and Experiential Learning Strategies* is a highly readable book that will inspire online instructors and instructional designers with its insights and suggestions for developing online courses and engaging learners.



## Information Literacy: Key to an Inclusive Society



The chapters in this collection provide examples and evidence to support a wide range of research about information literacy.

**Joshua Welsh** is an assistant professor in the English Department at Central Washington University. His research involves rhetoric and technology, with special interests in online technical writing pedagogy, intellectual property, open-source software, and mobile computing.

He holds an MS (2009) and a PhD (2013) from the University of Minnesota

### ***Information Literacy: Key to an Inclusive Society***

4th European Conference, ECIL 2016, Prague, Czech Republic, October 10-13, 2016, Revised Selected Papers, 1st Ed.

Serap Kurbanoğlu, Joumana Boustany, Sonja Špiranec, Esther Grassian, Diane Mizrahi, Lorie Roy, & Tolga Çakmak, (Eds.). (2017). Springer. [ISBN: 978-3-319-52162-6, 742 pages, US\$139.99 (softcover).]

*Information Literacy: Key to an Inclusive Society* offers the conference proceedings from the 4th European Conference on Information Literacy. It contains 72 individual chapters covering a wide range of topics. Overall, the individual contributions are well-argued and thoroughly researched. Research tends to be qualitative in nature, and methodology tends to be well thought out, justified, and transparent.

The collection is divided into 13 sections, which focus on topics such as "Inclusive Society and Democracy," "Employability and Workplace," "Various Literacies," "Reading Preference: Print vs Electronic," and "Discipline Based Studies," to name just a few.

While it is difficult to summarize even the individual sections, let alone the entire collection, individual samples provide a reasonable representation of the overall direction of the book. For example, "The Searching Circle: Library Instruction for Tribal College Students" by Roy, Orr, and Gienger provides a very helpful overview of the searching circle concept, which is "a culturally based information seeking behavior model that overlays indigenous life skills with seeking information in any format for any purpose, especially to serve academic needs" (p. 23). The Searching Circle as a learning methodology is "qualitative and multidimensional, building on formal publications and lived experiences" (p. 23). The authors then report on the creation of instructional videos that use the Searching Circle methodology to various library skills to college tribal students and provide guidelines for others that are interested in using this methodology and modality in the future.

Another chapter from the Inclusive Society and Democracy section is "Re-framing Information Literacy for Social Justice" by Laura Saunders. Saunders's article asks a question of crucial importance to anyone interested in the relationships among technology, literacy, and democracy: Should we simply train our students for jobs or should we work to develop citizens to able to fully contribute to democratic society? Whereas some Library Science scholars have argued against integrating social justice into the Associations of College & Research Libraries' Framework for information literacy for higher education on the basis that social justice is not "transformative" and therefore not a threshold concept for information literacy skills, Saunders points to the writings of Paolo Freire, Henry Giroux, and John Dewey to argue in favor of integrating social justice into this curriculum. Saunders then proposes a new frame for the information literacy in higher education framework that does include social justice, which would make it possible to integrate ideas such as power and authority as key information literacy concepts.

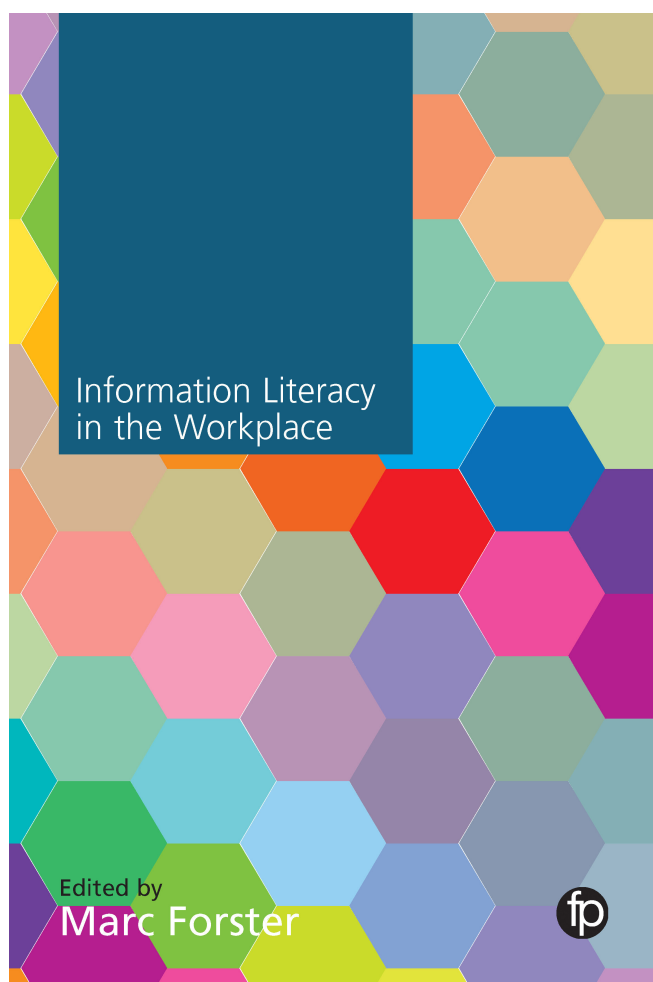
Another interesting chapter comes from Diane Mizrahi et al. who contributed "The Academic Reading Format International Study (ARFIS): Investigating Students Around the World." This chapter follows up on earlier research by the lead author which found that students at UCLA "if given a choice, preferred academic texts in print rather than online" (p. 217). In the current chapter, the authors conducted a survey of 9,279 participants coming from 19 countries to determine how reading format preferences vary across cultures. While the results do show some variance in terms of device use and format preference, the overall conclusion is compelling, showing that "print format is more conducive for focusing and remembering material, and students across the globe are more likely to engage in their print material through highlighting, noting and reviewing" (p. 226).

While these examples provide just the smallest taste of what is to be found in this collection, they demonstrate some of the common traits of the collection as a whole: The chapters in this collection provide examples and evidence to support a wide range of research about information literacy. While some of the chapters may seem extraordinarily tightly focused on a particular population segment in a particular country, I believe that this focus is one of the strengths of the collection.

The only weakness of the collection, in my view, is that the individual pieces are difficult to tie together and contextualize. As such, the collection is as much overwhelming as it is enriching. This could have been solved by an introductory essay that contextualizes the contributions and makes them accessible to interested scholars from other fields. Similarly, the individual sections would have benefited from brief essays to make the reader aware of the ongoing scholarly discussions that inform each grouping of chapters. Nevertheless, the book provides a wealth of research and information that can be of service to anyone working on a major project involving information literacies and how those literacies can affect inclusive societies.



## Information Literacy in the Workplace: New Perspectives



This book attempts to help educators understand the IL needs of those in the workplace. Exploring current IL educational objectives and strategies, the authors determine that the needs of those in the workplace do differ from the needs of those in higher education where the objectives of IL pedagogy and the academic language associated with IL concepts may not be relevant in professional contexts.

**Joni Boone** has a master's degree in English and has taught and tutored composition for 15 years. For the past five years, she has been a faculty developer at an online university. Her research interests include multimedia feedback, plagiarism trends and prevention, and personality type in organizations and education.

### ***Information Literacy in the Workplace***

Marc Forster, (Ed.). 2017. London: Facet Publishing. [ISBN 978-1-78330-132-4. 208 pages, including index, US\$89.99 (softcover).]

In the academic world, information literacy (IL) is a key component to success in the classroom. Programs provide IL training to prepare students to explore their academic disciplines and eventually contribute to them through research and writing. Do these IL skills that are honed in the classroom transfer easily to the professional world? That is the essential question explored in *Information Literacy in the Workplace*.

This book attempts to help educators understand the IL needs of those in the workplace. Exploring current IL educational objectives and strategies, the authors determine that the needs of those in the workplace do differ from the needs of those in higher education where the objectives of IL pedagogy and the academic language associated with IL concepts may not be relevant in professional contexts.

Editor and contributor Marc Foster introduces a study of IL in the nursing profession in Chapter 2, "How is Information Literacy Experienced," and this study is referred to throughout the book. The study breaks down how and why nurses learn on the job and prompts authors to explore one of the most interesting topics in the book – ethics. Authors emphasize how IL is an ethical consideration since the safety of patients in certain fields is a major factor in the workplace. But ethical considerations are also important in non-medical fields where client information, public concern, and other factors exist. Workers in those areas need to be able to access, analyze, and use information in ethical ways. Information literacy best practices are encouraged throughout the book to establish ethical workplaces.

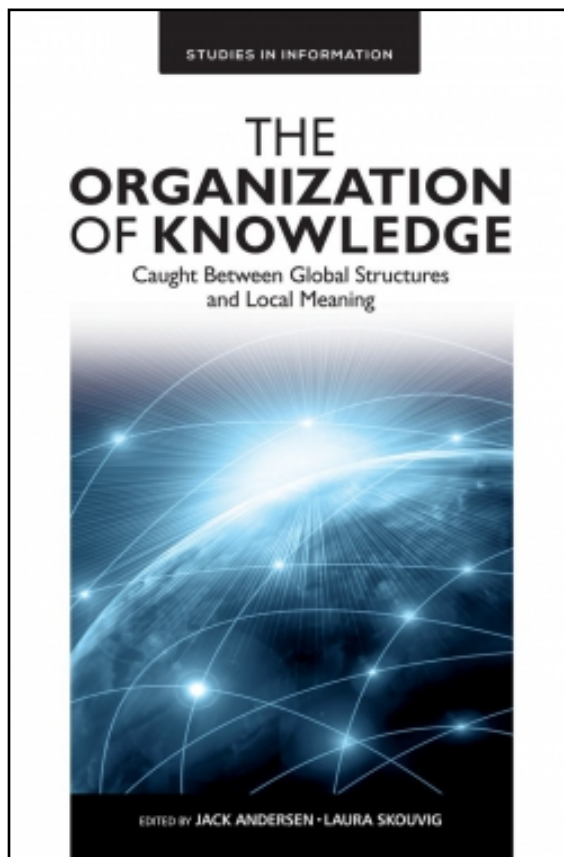
Two other essential themes explored in the book include the importance of context and personalization in the professional world. In the context-specific nature of workplace IL, it is important to hire individuals who know how to use information and who create an environment conducive to IL for organizations to thrive. Similarly, regarding personalization, the authors of this book explore how collaboration, personal growth, and client fulfillment are necessary components when considering IL in professional environments.

In one of the most practical chapters in the book, Chapter 8, "Learning within for Beyond: Exploring a Workplace Information Literacy Design," Annemaree Lloyd provides a helpful framework for teaching IL in three stages to prepare students for the workplace. This chapter ties much of the theory presented in the book together in a design that could be easily implemented in higher education settings.

Ultimately, this book makes a case for the value of IL in the workplace. Contributors to this text include executives in the professional world as well as a variety of representatives from academia – librarians, professors, and others in academic leadership roles. These differing perspectives provide a robust look at how IL is an important part of the world outside of academics.



## The Organization of Knowledge: Caught Between Global Structures and Local Meaning



There was a day when government and educational institutions held the keys to the global information and organization castle, but today knowledge organization is evolving to end users demanding more relevant information to serve their needs in their everyday lives, and they have come to expect that terms fit modern times and cultures. These needs sparked a one-day conference in 2015 in Copenhagen and covered Global and Local Knowledge Organization.

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### ***The Organization of Knowledge: Caught Between Global Structures and Local Meaning***

Jack Anderson and Laura Souvig, (Eds.). 2017. Wagon Lane, Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing [ISBN: 978-1-78714-532-0], 102 pages including index, \$US114.95 (hard cover).]

There was a day when government and educational institutions held the keys to the global information and organization castle, but today knowledge organization is evolving to end users

demanding more relevant information to serve their needs in their everyday lives, and they have come to expect that terms fit modern times and cultures. These needs sparked a one-day conference in 2015 in Copenhagen and covered Global and Local Knowledge Organization. Extended conversations following the conference revolved around the tension between global and local information structures; as a result, *The Organization of Knowledge: Caught Between Global Structure and Local Meaning* was written. The book included six chapters of articles written by scholars in information studies on how to approach today's problems of classification, categorization, and description in libraries and similar types of institutions that have controlled organizing knowledge in the past.

One of the chapters written by information scholar, Jack Anderson, argued that the public at large makes sense of the world using digital communication; this means that digital communication is a tool and not an objective to achieve human communication, and this objective pointed to the organization of knowledge being a genre. Anderson pointed out that the organization of knowledge should be seen as both "an analytical concept to understand communication in digital culture and as a particular genre in digital communication" (p. 14). Numerous examples in this chapter show how digital communication has become a way to order and archive daily lives.

Laura Skouvig shared how information cultures were formed and perceived through the 18th and 19th centuries. Skouvig discussed "how the concept of information culture might provide a way of formulating a genealogic strategy" (p. 18). Lust for information was the norm then and now as information creates action, but it's made clear in this chapter that technology merely framed information gathered for specific purposes in specific settings.

Melissa Adler discussed some of the history on the Library of Congress (LoC), how the organization impacted libraries around the globe, how the LoC subject headings have and could continue to serve as a template for local information adaptations in libraries worldwide. The downside is the LoC has American-centered views that contain colonial biases that must be addressed to create effective local adaptations. Adler uses a local New Zealand case study to demonstrate how practices, dating back to the Spanish American War in the United States, resulted in missing effective classifications for the indigenous population then and now, but still acknowledges benefits to globally recognized standards.

Daniel Martinez-Avila focused on the historical tension between local classifications versus global standardization. He introduced the reader-interest classifications concept, how

important the interest of the users become when integrating this concept in libraries, and how the book industry influenced standards. Libraries surveyed users and found “that the majority of users were not satisfied with public library service” (p. 55-56), so the reader interest concept was explored. Challenges were cited in case studies that focused on the variety of local community needs, how the book industry classification model was considered, and the library workload issues that arose when creating hybrid reader-interest classification and standardized models.

Fabio Assis Pinho added photographic documentation to the conversation, shared a case study, showed systems proposed to effectively document images, and argued that photos must be properly represented and organized in local and global systems.

Jose Augusto Chaves Guimaraes argued the need to balance local and global information to alleviate biases to create supportive environments for diverse groups and communities. Guimaraes pointed out that knowledge organization is naturally slanted because world views are slanted, “by the author/document, [by] classifications...[by] the environment (e.g., institution), and [by] the users” (p. 95); however, there is a difference between being slanted and bias. Bias is a detour that drifts toward prejudice. To manage this bias, one must consider the context of times when certain values and social factors existed. Ultimately, to address a slanted Knowledge Organization (KO), one must become aware of words and terms that establish bridges between local and global needs; one must understand and classify terms that carry different perceptions, and understand and classify terms that change over time.

The format of *The Organization of Knowledge: Caught Between Global Structure and Local Meaning* is easy to follow with each chapter providing: an abstract, keywords, a chapter outline, a clear introduction and conclusion, clear arguments and discussion points, and references. In the introduction, it was clearly stated that there is no perfect solution to achieving a global and local knowledge organization balance. However, time and cultures change, and library classifications, categorizations, and descriptions established over 120 years ago are not serving global or local needs today. As a result, end users have become less tolerant of outdated classifications, categorizations, and descriptions of libraries, or similar institutions. The challenge is that completely standardized, global approaches are no longer of service; there must be local threads of information and modern classifications that may, or may not, be standardized among all institutions. The next step is to find the resources, the time, and the money to dedicate to this immense issue.