



Remember Your Training!

Golf courses are redesigned all the time, but you can still see parts of the old course that remind you that no matter what, the fourth green still breaks towards the road or the wind still comes into play even if the trees have grown. Understanding a course's history can inform how you play the current course and provide greater context for your overall mental approach.

Writing programs have histories. They have been designed, built, redesigned, rebuilt, and redesigned again—some on the same learning outcomes or some on the same labor of faculty and institutional relationships. Writing program leaders of all experience levels should recognize their history, their training, and their expertise when administering their program. And using this identity to sometimes resist higher level initiatives in favor of a student-focused program can be a good thing.

What we like about Stuart A. Selber and colleagues' chapter is that it focuses on stabilizing online writing instruction (OWI) process and practices at an institutional level in order for them to be productive and effective. What Selber et al. argue about aligning online and face-to-face courses and offering some level of institutional standardization has real value because it places the student user above the institutional, teacher, or programmatic agendas. It factors in history and builds for a more stable future.

Chapter 5. Institutionalizing Online Writing Instruction

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Abstract: An ongoing tension in online writing instruction (OWI) is balancing the interests of writing programs and individual teachers. On the one hand, centralizing certain practices and elements of OWI enables a program to achieve its goals. On the other hand, decentralizing certain practices and elements of OWI enables individuals to teach to their own strengths. Successfully institutionalizing OWI involves finding a useful balance between teacher and program needs, an objective that can be difficult to achieve in the complex contexts of higher education. We found a useful balance by distinguishing between standardized and personalized course content, articulating approaches to instructional design, and aligning residential and online courses to a certain extent. But these areas of emphasis are not particular to our writing program. They're relevant to nearly any program that has evolved to include OWI.

Keywords: online writing instruction, institutions, centralization, decentralization, instructional design

Discussions of institutions in professional journals, on listserv lists, and on social media platforms often focus on what's wrong with academic workplaces and who's to blame for problems that undermine the efforts of writing program administrators (WPAs). There are plenty of problems to contend with that are a function of larger contexts and forces—budgetary decisions of upper administrators (Welch & Scott, 2016), gray areas of copyright laws (Galín, 2009), and labor crises in universities, including the emotional labor involved in running a writing program (Wooten et al., 2020), to name a few. But writing programs must still institutionalize online writing instruction (OWI) if they're to realize the purposes of having a program in the first place and achieve the desired outcomes. By institutionalize, we mean stabilizing the practices of OWI in ways that are productive for both teachers and universities as organized sites of higher education (Selber, 2020).

Historically, various versions of distance education (DE) were considered to be innovations. Penn State offered its first version of DE in 1892. It consisted of correspondence courses provided via Rural Free Delivery, which extended the home delivery of print mail to rural locations (Smutz & Weidemann, 2012). These correspondence courses enabled a new population of workers to access college-level instruction for the first time. A little over a century later, Penn State expanded its scope by offering instruction online to students living anywhere in the world. Quite naturally and quietly, early versions of online instruction

reflected the approaches to DE that had become institutionalized over many decades, but not all of these approaches have been fruitful for OWI. As the people responsible for the current online courses in Penn State's English department, we've spent many years destabilizing and restabilizing institutional dimensions to make things work for a large writing program with our own priorities.

This chapter discusses how we assumed ownership over the English portfolio of online courses, which historically has been controlled by a centralized delivery unit (the World Campus), and what this development has meant for teachers, students, and writing program administrators. Although our story is a positive one, it has required us, among other things, to

1. distinguish between personalized and standardized course content,
2. articulate our approaches to instructional design, and
3. align residential and online courses to some extent.

Our efforts in these three areas have created new programmatic practices, but we've tried to implement our approaches in ways that make sense for everyone and not just OWI enthusiasts. These areas of emphasis—the chapter takeaways—are not particular to our writing program. In fact, we imagine them to be relevant to nearly any program that has evolved to include OWI. Our hope is that others can benefit from how we've thought about the need to accommodate, and sometimes resist, both teachers and institutions.

The thinking we share has been informed by PARS, a method for approaching OWI that encourages teachers, and their courses and programs, to be personal, accessible, responsive, and strategic (Borgman & McArdle, 2019). These guiding concepts have multiple meanings and applications in the institutional contexts for design, instruction, and administration. For our purposes, *personal* refers to how we encourage individuals to teach to their own strengths and embrace their own pedagogical styles: Any approach to OWI must emphasize teacher buy-in and support. *Accessible* refers to how we have integrated OWI into our larger writing program, making it inclusive of everyone who teaches in our department. *Responsive* refers to how our instructional designs for OWI model a writing workflow, which requires teachers to be fully present and active in their courses. And *strategic* refers to how we balance programmatic and individual needs to make OWI work as a productive institutional operation. For us, the PARS framework functions heuristically to help us give disciplinary meaning and pragmatic shape to OWI.

Theory and Practice

Stuart directed the Program in Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) at Penn State from 2006-2012. PWR is responsible for two general education writing requirements. English 15 is our first-year writing course, focusing on argumentation. In a typical calendar year, about 10,000 students are enrolled in English 15. English 202, our upper-division writing course, divides students according to majors for

workplace-facing instruction. The four versions of English 202 cover social science, humanities, technical, and business writing. In a typical calendar year, another 10,000 students or so are enrolled in English 202. During the COVID-19 pandemic, all of the sections of these courses were delivered in a modified online format, but normally we see around 4,000 students in the online versions of English 15 and 202. This considerable number will only grow as we continue to wrestle with space and scheduling constraints and accommodate new populations of students.

Each director of PWR has put their stamp on the program. Stuart especially focused on digital dimensions of writing, teaching, and administering a large-scale program. Some of his projects included growing the portfolio of online courses, refocusing teacher-training courses to address OWI, and spearheading the hiring of technology specialists (Daniel and then Leslie) to assist the department with OWI. Stuart also convinced the department head to increase the number of course releases for program assistants from two and a half, which is a full-time load for one person for an academic year, to three course releases. Stuart then distributed the course releases, giving one each to three different graduate students. The result was that three people now work eight hours per week versus one person working twenty hours per week. Although the increase in support was modest, this more all-hands-on-deck approach has allowed us to leverage a wider and more specific range of pedagogical expertise: PWR assistants can now be hired for their ability to support OWI.

As Stuart was finishing his directorship, he was worried about what would happen to the progress the program had made on OWI, for, in our experience, the advancement of institutional agendas can hinge on the energy of a few individuals or even a single individual. Stuart speculated that the best way to proceed was to persuade the department to create a new position: director of digital education. This position would assign responsibility for making progress to a tenure-line faculty member whose institutional status would indicate the importance of OWI. Importantly, it would not splinter off OWI from PWR but would create a support system in the department. The system would support the program, as in centralization practices, as well as individual teachers, as in decentralization practices, helping both to succeed and accomplish their goals: Centralization and decentralization are not binary oppositions but rather interdependent modes of institutionalization (Simon, 1980).

There are two reasons why our portfolio of online courses has become a marquee project in the English department: The portfolio generates two-thirds of the operating budget for the department; and the portfolio has an annual impact on dozens of teachers and thousands of students. So, there are institutional incentives for making our online courses as effective as possible for everyone involved. The problem was that we inherited an institutional process for online course development that was meant to be a solution for an entire campus rather than a specific program. Although certain instructional-design concepts can transcend fields, a one-size-fits-all approach can never accommodate the pedagogical differences

that exist within, between, and among fields. Let us clarify the situation by working through some of the backstory.

In 1998, Stuart received a grant to create the online version of our technical writing service course, the first English department DE course. The funding for the grant came from the then university president, who was rolling out the World Campus—the centralized unit that supports online courses. The World Campus was considered to be the twenty-fifth Penn State campus, but this designation has always puzzled us because it does not hire faculty or do many of the other things a college campus does. In reality, the World Campus is a delivery unit, and this fact helps to explain its processes and relationships.

As opposed to hiring faculty, the World Campus collaborates with departments to develop online courses. Although our delivery platforms have evolved since 1998, the process for online course development has remained constant over the years. Assuming that a department, its dean, and the World Campus have all agreed to develop an online course, the World Campus assigns an instructional designer and the department assigns a faculty member, establishing the basic project team. The faculty member is responsible for authoring the content, and the instructional designer is responsible for structuring that content into a course. This construct creates a form/content binary that drives the entire development process. The main upside is that faculty members who know little to nothing about teaching online are paired with instructional designers who can apply their trained skills to solve certain types of institutional problems—among them, staffing academic departments with faculty members who can design online courses, leveraging knowledge across siloed departments, creating and managing shareable content, and complying with accessibility standards. But for OWI, the downsides far outweighed the positives.

We will sort a few of the main downsides into two categories: design and implementation. By design, we mean how the World Campus asked us to approach the look, feel, and function of OWI. By implementation, we mean how we were able to put designed courses into action in our writing program. The specialists at the World Campus face a daunting task: designing online courses for any and all fields. Because it is impossible to have the requisite domain knowledge needed in every situation, the World Campus separates form and content and focuses just on form, or design, leaving content decisions to faculty members. This is an understandable strategy for a centralized approach to the process of online course development, especially in a large institution, and it can be successful when the instructional-design process is compatible with how faculty think about the nature of their courses. Form and content, however, are not so easily separated or contained. As two sides of the same coin, form and content are dependent upon each other in a mutually constitutive relationship. The point of the project team is to help instructional designers and faculty members negotiate this relationship, but, in reality, faculty members have little influence over the instructional-design process. For us, there was simply too much of a mismatch between the standard process and our goals for OWI.

From our perspective, the standard process overly prioritizes student-teacher interactions. As we noted above, DE at Penn State began with correspondence courses. But, in certain contexts and cases, including writing and writing instruction, a correspondence model has proven rather difficult to overcome. For example, the content development workflow for the World Campus stresses the elements of a syllabus. Institutionally speaking, a syllabus is understood as something of a contract between students and teachers, but in the context of instructional design, it was rearticulated as a guide for mapping interactions. First and foremost, we were encouraged to think of the role of teacher presence in online courses. However, this important concept was interpreted as being about the aspects of teacher presence that are discernible in a syllabus, such as information about satisfying course expectations, completing and turning in assignments, and grading practices. The result was a series of instructional-design patterns that centered more on the teacher and content than on student interaction and learning. Online courses, for instance, begin with an overview of requirements and deadlines. Although the overviews are useful, they don't warrant a central location in the template grid. We wanted to redesign our courses to foreground student interaction and learning. In a subsequent section, we'll elaborate on how our instructional-design approach now models a writing workflow.

In terms of implementation, we were highly constrained by how we were able to put our designed courses into action. A key constraint was an inability to change the content once a course had been finalized by an instructional designer. Online courses are revised on a three- to five-year cycle, depending on need and justification, and in between revisions, changes can be submitted to the World Campus. But the expectation is that such changes will simply correct typos or other small mistakes. Although we had academic oversight over the content, it was locked in and locked down until it was time to revise. Once revised, a course was locked down once again for another three to five years. The product of this approach was a canned course teachers could not personalize to suit their own strengths and styles. Not surprisingly, the pedagogical experiences of teachers produced low morale and negatively affected how they thought about OWI. We had created a two-tiered program in which online courses were considered to be inferior to face-to-face courses rather than different types of courses with other possibilities.

These design and implementation problems were so significant that we were able to destabilize the status quo and make a successful institutional proposal to assume control over both form and content. As far as we know, we're the only disciplinary unit at Penn State that has complete responsibility for this otherwise centrally governed enterprise. Our proposal to control our portfolio was successful because we already had experience with key instructional-design tasks, such as establishing learning objectives, designing courses around them, and assessing the extent to which students are able to achieve those objectives. In addition, we already knew about employing educational technologies, complying with accessibility standards, and interpreting copyright laws. At the time of our proposal, then, we were functioning in fundamental ways as instructional designers, defying institutional job classifications

that segregate the overlapping work of instructional designers and teachers in fields with a productive and rich history of studying and practicing online learning.

Conclusions and Takeaways

Restabilizing OWI

By destabilizing the institutional status quo, we were able to realize significant improvements for teachers and students. Teachers can now create customized versions of online courses, for example, and students experience a product of instructional design that makes much more sense for OWI. But teachers and students don't exist in a vacuum or operate independently. To help teachers function successfully in our program, and to help our program achieve its goals, such as assigning an equal amount of work to all students and building consensus around grading expectations, we needed to restabilize our operation in certain respects. Focusing only on how we broke down hierarchies fails to account for the nature of work in institutions or what can be useful about hierarchies. The trick is to balance the impulse to decentralize decision-making with centralization practices that help to produce the right overall effect: Any approach to OWI must work for both programs and individual teachers. Three takeaways that can help programs find a useful balance include distinguishing between standardized and personalized course content, articulating approaches to instructional design, and aligning residential and online courses to a certain extent. For analytic purposes, we align these takeaway points with phases in a conceptual model for institutional innovation and change.

B.K. Curry (1991) advanced a generative model with three recursive phases: mobilization, in which institutions are readied for change; implementation, in which innovations are introduced into institutions; and—more to our point—institutionalization, in which innovations are stabilized by institutions. According to Curry, innovations achieve an appreciable level of stability once they have become integrated into the structures, procedures, and cultures of institutions. Structural integration involves developing formalized support systems for innovations and realizing significant moments in which innovations are merged with established institutional formations. Procedural integration involves routinizing the activities associated with innovations, developing workflows, and adapting innovations to existing ways of working. And cultural integration involves accepting or tolerating the norms and values associated with innovations and attempting to use them for principal job activities. The conditions associated with these phases can domesticate innovations but also engender alternatives and new possibilities.

Three Takeaway Points

To restabilize OWI at these three levels, we

1. articulated boundaries between the different types of online course

- content, specifying what instructors are allowed to personalize in order to leverage their instructional strengths and what needs to remain standardized for programmatic purposes (structural integration);
2. prepared a design statement for online courses that articulates our educational philosophy and guides our instructional-design workflow (procedural integration); and
 3. aligned our face-to-face and online courses to a point where all teachers can be assigned any version of a writing course (cultural integration).

Per the PARS approach, our strategy was to implement the elements that help us institutionalize OWI in concrete ways, making them legible to teachers in our program and to broader communities.

Structural Integration: Distinguishing Between Personalized and Standardized Course Content

Keri Dutkiewicz et al. (2013) explored the problem we've noted of managing a multiple-section course in ways that are useful to all stakeholders. They conclude that "a balance of faculty autonomy in customizing courses with the inclusion of required pre-designed elements best serves to meet instructor expectations in meeting the unique needs of online learners" (p. 46). But what, exactly, might it mean to distinguish between personalized and standardized course content, especially when striving for a maximum amount of teacher autonomy? Answers to this question will likely vary somewhat across institutions, but we offer our approach as something of a heuristic for thinking about distinctions. After all, conventional thinking in the field has produced a fair amount of consensus around writing program development. In our program, teachers can personalize

- non-standardized elements of the syllabus, such as expectations for the number of posts and their word counts in discussions, weighting scales for final grades, and late policies;
- weekly overviews and commentaries;
- prompts for discussions, workshops, and exercises;
- evaluation criteria;
- assignments, their order, and assignment instructions; and
- supplemental materials.

Let us note two things. First, this list is roughly ordered from less to more complex. It is one thing to change late policies or rewrite discussion prompts and quite another to swap out entire assignments, which would have more of a ripple effect throughout the course. Second, any changes must comply with copyright laws and accessibility standards. Stuart reviews copyright considerations for any new materials, but teachers must provide alternative texts (alt texts) for image files, transcripts for audio files, and transcripts and closed-captioning for video

files. To help with decision-making, teachers need to know how much work it will be to personalize aspects of a course.

To help our program achieve its goals, the following must remain standardized:

- course descriptions and learning outcomes;
- textbooks, required materials, and required software programs;
- grading scales;
- descriptions of World Campus or university policies and services, including those pertaining to deferred grades, academic integrity, the TEACH Act, disabilities, nondiscrimination, IT support, libraries, veterans and service members, counseling and psychological services, and university emergency procedures; and
- instructional-design frameworks, including the design of the role of teacher presence in discussions, workshops, and exercises.

One of our frustrations is not being able to allow teachers to select their own textbooks. The issue is that the World Campus abides by a federal law stating that students should know their true costs at least six months in advance. Because the English department doesn't assign courses until closer to the start of the term, well after textbook orders have been submitted, teachers can't personalize textbook choices. From our perspective, the problem is with the scheduling process and not the law, which provides much-needed transparency in an age of rising educational expenses. Also, the irony is not lost on us that we have restabilized the instructional-design frameworks for OWI. Although we restrict teachers in the same ways the World Campus restricted us, there are two key differences: We now have instructional designs that are appropriate for OWI, and we can allow teachers to personalize if they have a sound justification and the ability to implement the changes. One of the reasons we restrict personalization in this area by default is to establish an effective level of teacher presence. As we discuss in the next subsection, our online writing courses are discussion-based courses that model a writing workflow and involve regular and routine interactions among everyone involved.

Procedural Integration: Articulating Instructional-Design Approaches

To destabilize the institutional status quo, we needed to make the case that we had a better approach to instructional design than the World Campus and that we could operationalize our vision in an academic department. We made that case successfully with slide decks in a variety of meetings with stakeholders, but since then we have turned our talking points into a student-centered design statement that articulates our approach. Design statements are used to externalize and make explicit fundamental assumptions, concepts, and processes employed in a creative project. The surface structure of the genre varies according to the specific circumstances of rhetorical situations. For example, design statements that serve invention purposes tend to focus on the concepts behind a project, driving forces, and pathways of

development. Like certain types of deliberative proposals about the future, they tend to be more speculative in that the project under consideration does not yet exist for users. Our design statement is more epideictic in nature, praising the present and what students can now expect in online courses. The exigence for our student-centered design statement was the COVID-19 pandemic. Literally over a weekend, all students in English 15 and 202 shifted to OWI, leaving more than a few of them—and some teachers—with understandable questions about how our online courses work. It was an unforeseen opportunity to re-institutionalize our discourse for a new audience and remind ourselves of the reasoning that guides our instructional designs.

To provide a model for OWI, the appendix contains our full design statement. We identify a few elements here that we consider to be particularly pertinent to administrators. Any design statement should discuss the contexts for the task at hand, for OWI will be enabled, constrained, and otherwise shaped by a panoply of institutional circumstances. In our case, we review background information on the role of the World Campus and our history with OWI. The point is to inform students about our considerable experience, which is invisible to them, and to persuade students that our courses will deliver a meaningful education. We recognize that students can be skeptical about online learning—and often rightly so. A design statement for OWI should also discuss pedagogical assumptions or knowledge claims. In our case, we assume, among other things, that

- writing is a skill that can be trained through ongoing practice;
- successful writers follow a deliberate and deliberative process;
- a key component of this process is receiving feedback on plans and drafts; and
- although grammar is important, writing often fails in the first place because of higher-order considerations.

Being explicit about assumptions or knowledge claims increases the likelihood that everyone will better understand where our approach is coming from and what form it will take.

Importantly, the form of instructional designs should be described concretely and in detail. Instructional designers reference any number of learning theorists and frameworks—Benjamin Bloom (1956) and his taxonomy are popular choices in our setting—but for OWI, the form should primarily support how people learn a skill versus, say, understand or recall information. As Ron Berger (2018) put it in his critique of Bloom, to learn a skill like writing, “we have to apply and create in order to understand. The creation process is where we construct deep understanding” (n.p.). The implication is that instructional designs for OWI should model a writing workflow.

In a typical assignment in our courses, students learn how to

- diagnose a writing situation;
- determine the best option for responding to the situation;

- plan a response;
- draft the response systematically, strategically, and ethically;
- incorporate feedback to improve the draft;
- design the documents—print and digital—in ways that aid reader comprehension;
- polish their prose; and
- reflect on their own processes and products.

In the regular way of thinking, the items in this list constitute learning outcomes, but in the context of instructional design, they provide a specification for mapping teacher-student, student-student, student-content, and content-platform interactions. We scaffold these interactions in ways that guide students through increasingly more complex writing problems and rhetorical processes for understanding and solving them. The design statement makes this approach explicit for students, for us, and for any other interested stakeholders or parties.

Cultural Integration: Aligning Residential and Online Courses

A thorny challenge for WPAs is preparing a teaching staff for both face-to-face and online courses. Recall that at one point we had unwittingly created a two-tiered program in which online courses were considered to be inferior to face-to-face courses. We straightened out that problem by enabling teachers to personalize their online courses. Now, we have more and more teachers who want to teach online. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has driven up demand for a few different reasons, including an ongoing interest in social distancing and an interest from teachers who were intrigued by OWI and want to improve upon their pandemic experiences. Increased demand is a good problem to have, but it can be a problem nonetheless, particularly of coordination.

Our writing program has always taken teacher training seriously. Everyone who teaches English 15 must take a two-semester practicum, and there are one-semester practica for each version of English 202. Before OWI played a significant role in our program, and while our courses were locked down by the World Campus, we covered some basic issues in our regular teacher-training courses, which were primarily focused on residential instruction. We have expanded our coverage in these courses, but we also created a new course that focuses specifically on OWI. People who want to teach online must now take this new course as well as the regular practicum. It's not unusual for graduate students to complete four or five semesters of teacher training, depending on their pedagogical interests.

The coordination issue is a function of media specificities, for the most part. Many of our residential courses actually meet in computer classrooms and have a strong technology component, so much so that we also added a practicum for integrating technology into residential courses. They also use the same learning management system as online courses. There's a certain amount of planned

overlap, then, between all of the courses in our program. The issue has been that people teaching multiple sections of the same course in both residential and online versions have had a workload closer to two course preparations than one, a situation that was all the more problematic for those who teach different types of courses in the same term. Our solution has been to align the standard versions of residential and online courses, which originated at very different times and under very different conditions, to some extent to help minimize labor and time requirements. We want every teacher in our program to be able to teach any type of course and coordinate their pedagogical efforts in effective ways.

Although teachers can now personalize all of their courses, we still ask new teachers and experienced teachers new to a teaching field to start with the standard syllabi introduced in our practica. A standard syllabus presents a basic or “vanilla” approach to a course, one that is manageable for teachers and conventional enough to be recognizable in a job interview: Our practica aim to prepare people for the academic job market and not just our program. The technical writing service course, our example here, was originally organized around a major analytical report—a recommendation report, to be more precise. Students began with a literature review to identify and explore a problem of professional interest, wrote a proposal, conducted primary and additional secondary research, drafted the recommendation report, wrote a progress report, shared their findings in an oral presentation, and completed the final version of the recommendation report. The pedagogical scaffolding was obvious to even a casual observer, and the assignment genres required students to pay attention to a range of rhetorical issues, including text and page design, even if instructors accepted electronic files for final submissions. The analytical report has long played an organizing role in many technical writing courses.

When Stuart created the online version of this course, he did not use the residential syllabus as a starting point. Instead, he saw an opportunity to consider what might be involved in creating a course from the ground up that is more born-digital in nature and more sensitive to the media specificities of OWI. After all, the course would take an asynchronous approach, mediate all discussion and communication via a learning management system, use an online textbook, use resources from anywhere on the internet, and provide students with access to cloud-based software for creating websites, ePortfolios, and a variety of other online documents. The new syllabus scaffolds assignments not so much by interrelating report genres and elements but by unfolding the complexities of technical writing in a digital age. The course still employs certain conventional genres, as in resumes, technical descriptions, and instruction sets, but spends time exploring what happens to those genres when they move online. Online instruction sets, for instance, can be self-contained, leveraging the features of fixed instructional content; embedded, leveraging the features of user-generated metadata; or open, leveraging the features of mutable instructional content (Selber, 2010). The dynamics of genre migration across media platforms provide a potent site for rhetorical education.

Not aligning a new online course with an old residential course was a good decision, but it did destabilize our approach to technical writing and create new labor problems, as discussed previously. To solve these problems and restabilize things, we adopted a shared set of genres for both versions of the course. The key is that the genres have more interpretive flexibility than the analytical report, which is a rather more conservative genre in structural and sociocultural terms. We already mentioned the instruction set. Teachers can approach final products as print-based or born-digital documents, and online instructions can take radically different forms, depending on assumptions about audiences, tasks, and knowledge production. Another shared genre is the resume, which can be designed and delivered in traditional and non-traditional ways. The non-traditional ways include visually enhanced resumes, infographic resumes, video-based resumes, and portfolio-style resumes. Teachers can and do approach the same genre differently in residential and online versions of the course: Stuart teaches portfolio-style resumes in a campus computer lab and not online, for example. But aligning residential and online courses to some extent delimits and focuses the pedagogical terrain for teacher training and helps teachers coordinate and dovetail their daily efforts.

OWI is enabled, constrained, and otherwise shaped by an array of institutional forces and circumstances. WPAs must contend with this reality in an ongoing fashion if they hope to run a productive operation. A productive operation manages the tensions between the institutional needs of writing programs and the talents and strengths of individual teachers. To help achieve the right balance, WPAs can work to destabilize aspects of the status quo that are incongruent with OWI and work to restabilize OWI practices in ways that better benefit students, teachers, and programs. We restabilized our practices by distinguishing between standardized and personalized course content, articulating our approaches to instructional design, and aligning residential and online courses to a certain extent. These areas of emphasis are relevant to nearly any program that has evolved to include OWI.

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Appendix: Design Statement for OWI

If you are enrolled in one of our two general education requirements, English 15 or English 202, you might be wondering what it is like to take an online version. Let us share our approach with you, but we want to start with a bit of history.

In the English department, we have been offering online courses for over two decades. In fact, our portfolio now includes 17 online courses, and students in World Campus programs can earn an online English minor. You may have heard of the World Campus. It is not actually a campus in the usual sense of the term: They do not hire instructors, for example, or develop courses or programs on their own. In collaboration with academic departments, the World Campus offers more than 150 accredited graduate degrees, undergraduate degrees, certificates, and minors. There are over 20,000 World Campus students, and at times, some of them are our residential students.

Nowadays, distinguishing between online and residential students is less important than leveraging all that we have learned about distance education in order to help everyone manage and succeed. Although the online versions of our general education courses were designed to be taken by students living in any time zone—that is, the courses take an asynchronous approach, for the most

part—thousands of residential students have succeeded in these courses, and students have reported positive experiences.

When designing an online course, we begin by specifying goals, asking what we want students to know and be able to do by the end of the term. We then fashion interactions and activities to support these goals. We have the same goals for all of the sections of a general education course, whether that course runs online or in a campus building.

The goals for our courses are informed by what we know from research about the nature of literacy. We know, for example, that writing is a skill that can be trained through ongoing practice. We know that successful writers follow a deliberate and deliberative process. We know that a key component of this process is receiving feedback on plans and drafts. And we know that although grammar is important, writing often fails in the first place because of higher-order considerations, such as understanding how to appeal to readers or organize ideas logically and compellingly.

These evidence-based findings guide how we design and run our online courses. More specifically, we show students how to apply a durable approach to writing that will serve them both here at Penn State and on the job. In a typical assignment, students learn how to diagnose a writing situation; determine the best option for responding to the situation; plan a response; draft the response systematically, strategically, and ethically; incorporate feedback to improve the draft; design the documents—print and digital—in ways that aid reader comprehension; polish their prose; and more. But we do not stop there. Importantly, we also teach students how to reflect on their own processes and products, for we know that an ability to mobilize meta-awareness distinguishes expert from novice writers.

In the interest of time, we have glossed over much of the richness and nuance of the learning experience in our online courses, but we hope our thumbnail description is informative. As you can see, our writing courses are not lecture courses, and we do not ask students to read for the sake of reading. To put it differently, content is not the course. If it was, we would simply give everyone an Amazon gift card and tell them to go read. Content is important, but online learning spaces are created one interaction at a time, over and over again, as students engage with systems and materials, work with one another and their teachers, and participate in meaningful activities. The role of teachers in online environments is as crucial as in any other environment. Our teachers, therefore, are present, active, and involved.

Finally, we want to emphasize that writing in the twenty-first century is always already a digital enterprise, and that writers often work remotely anyway. Taking a writing class online is actually a natural way to learn to become literate in our technological world.

We look forward to seeing you in one of our online courses. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Stuart Selber, Director of Digital Education. You can find his contact information on the English department website. Thank you.