

Oregon Writing Project at Southern Oregon University

2019-20 Site Report



Cover photos

Young authors from summer writing camps prepare to read their writing (top left)
Linda Christensen: "Culturally Responsive Teaching in Action" workshop (top right)
Teacher presenters at ILGA workshop (lower left)
SOU participants at "Culturally Responsive Teaching in Action" workshop (lower right)

Oregon Writing Project at SOU

2019-20 Site Report to the National Writing Project

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I. Overview and Current Context of the Site

Southern Oregon University (SOU) is a small regional public university serving an extensive, mostly rural, area of the state. 2019-20 was our eighth year of re-affiliation with the National Writing Project¹. The OWP's highlights this year included:

- Two full-day workshops (84 teachers).
- Young authors' reading and reception in fall 2020, attended by 120 people, where 2019 campers read from their summer writing.
- Three teachers taught four OWP 2020 summer young authors' camps (remotely via Zoom), attended by 25 students.

We continued to emphasize the alignment of OWP's work with the university's mission; however, many of the programs and activities that we had planned for 2019-20 were cancelled or drastically curtailed by the COVID-19 pandemic. We were able to move camps online, for instance, but fewer teachers than usual led camps, and we capped the number of campers to make the remote format feasible. With site leaders and K-12 teachers alike experiencing the additional burden of teaching remotely, and with funding sources' delay in announcing grant opportunities, we did not hold a summer intensive institute.

Despite these setbacks, the OWP strives to play a key role in linking SOU with teachers in our region, supporting their development throughout their careers. Participating teachers come from over twelve school districts extending from Yreka (northern California) to Klamath Falls to Roseburg. Many began their careers as undergraduate English majors at SOU, enrolled in the MAT program, and completed their student teaching in classrooms of OWP teacher-consultants.

The OWP site directors teach in both the English program and the School of Education, working closely with student teachers in secondary schools and with the cooperating teachers who mentor them. The site directors also oversee SOU's Advanced Southern Credit program in English language

¹ From 1992 to 2010, the OWP at SOU was an active site supported by a combination of federal NWP grants, and course releases allocated to the site director by the university. From 2010-2012 we were an 'inactive' site, due to lack of university support in the wake of the loss of federal funding to the National Writing Project.

arts, providing professional learning opportunities for 30 high school teachers who teach these dual-credit courses (fulfilling accreditation requirements for the ASC English program).

These overlapping roles help us facilitate SOU's outreach to teachers as they move through their careers, continue their professional development as required by the Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission, and become mentors to pre-service teachers. The connectivity, or sense of professional 'home' throughout their careers that the OWP offers teachers, is part of the vision we hold for the OWP — and a clear example of the “regionally engaged learning community” serving learners throughout their lives that is promoted in the University's mission statement.

In addition to fostering individual teachers' leadership development, the OWP plays a key role in linking teachers with their colleagues. Summer institutes and classes, as well as workshops during the year, create opportunities for teachers to learn from each other's experience and practice — as participants in colleagues' workshops, and as facilitators themselves. Summer young-authors' camps give teachers opportunities to collaboratively develop and try out creative, engaging writing lessons.

Securing university support for the site directors' course-release time continues to be a challenge in an ongoing period of fiscal uncertainty at our university, statewide in higher education, and nationwide in public education. In 2019-20, the OWP site director and co-director each received one (10-week quarter) university-supported course release. These two releases comprised approximately 8% of each site director's annual academic loading. This support was due in part to ongoing efforts to keep the university administration informed about the OWP's ongoing work.

We were disappointed to learn that university support in 2020-21 would be reduced to one 10-week course release, which the two site directors will share. Although our activities were curtailed in 2019-20, and our university support will significantly decrease in 2020-21, we see part of our work going forward as securing support that will enable us to resume robust programming in service of SOU's mission in the future.

II. The Work of the Writing Project

We are proud of what we were able to accomplish in 2019-20 despite limited resources (two single-course releases, no outside funding) and significant challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In-service: Classes, workshops, and other professional development

Culturally Responsive Teaching in Action (September 7, 2020). This full-day workshop with Linda Christensen was attended by 63 teachers. (The School of Education covered workshop fees for 16 students.) The workshop built on the momentum of Zaretta Hammond's April 2019 presentation, putting some of the concepts from that presentation into practice. Feedback was unanimously appreciative and enthusiastic, with many teachers wishing for another workshop, perhaps focused on poetry and social justice, in the future.

Information Literacy and Genre Analysis (ILGA) workshop (October 11, 2020). This full-day open workshop consisted of presentations and demonstration lessons led by three C3WP teachers and three SOU faculty members. Twenty-one teachers (high school and college) attended; the

workshop fulfilled the professional-development requirement for Advanced Southern Credit teachers.

Camps development workshop (February 1, 2020). This workshop, to help teachers develop and plan camps for summer 2020, was led by teacher-consultant Cliff Cowley.

Advanced Southern Credit

The OWP provides professional development workshops for over 30 high school language arts teachers of Advanced Southern Credit (ASC) courses (ENG 104/105, 204/205, 208/209, and WR 121/122). As part of ASC program accreditation, these teachers are required to participate in annual professional development with SOU faculty in order to maintain their ASC eligibility. Wherever possible, we try to design ASC workshops that will also be relevant and useful to a broader audience of teachers, such as the ILGA workshop described above.

Young Authors' Camps

The annual Young Authors' Reading and Reception was held on the SOU campus on October 25, 2019. Over 100 people attended (families, friends, camp leaders, campers); young authors (from summer 2019 camps, detailed in 2019 site report) read from their work, and received a free copy of the anthology *Wordscapes 2019*.

Because of the pandemic, our camps offerings were significantly reduced in summer 2020. We were able to move camps online, but fewer teachers than usual stepped up to lead camps, and we capped the number of campers to make the remote format feasible. We ultimately offered four camps, led by three teachers, with a total of 25 students.

Scholastic judging

OWP once again served as an adjudicating site for the Scholastic Writing Awards in 2019-2020. Four graduate students and thirteen undergraduate English majors scored (8-10 hours of reading each) student submissions. (This was a requirement for preservice teachers enrolled in MAT528B Language Arts Teaching Methods, launching a winter-term discussion of student writing and voice.) Students received \$50 and a good professional item to include on their resumes. The preservice teacher who coordinated the Scholastic judging will enter SOU's MAT program for a secondary language arts endorsement next year; coordinating this event (and supporting the OWP in general) has provided significant professional learning for her.

University partnerships

Faculty Writing House. In fall 2020, SOU's Faculty Writing House was established with support from the Provost and multiple academic divisions on campus. The OWP site director was on the faculty committee advocating for and establishing the House. The OWP donated bench cushions, and held regular open hours for faculty on Fridays. The site director planned to host a "Writing as Uncertainty" event in spring 2020, part of SOU's Campus Theme programming, but this event was cancelled due to the pandemic.

Inter-program collaboration. We have strong relationships with programs across campus, particularly the School of Education and the University Seminar Program (first-year writing). For example, the site director met this year with the director of SOU's University Studies and the director of the Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning; funding was approved for two SOU instructors to attend the institute "Future-focused literacy: Teaching and leading for equity, diversity, and inclusion," (which has not yet taken place because of the pandemic). And as noted above, the School of Education paid workshop fees for 16 students to attend Linda Christensen's fall workshop "Culturally Responsive Teaching in Action."

Grant-writing, scholarship

Institute/grant proposal. In fall 2019, site director Margaret Perrow developed a proposal for an institute tentatively called "Future-focused literacy: Teaching and leading for equity, diversity, and inclusion." This institute will combine an intensive summer component with ongoing meetings throughout the year, culminating in a set of presentations and demonstration lessons by participants for K-12 colleagues. This proposal is ready to submit to SOREN (see below) when funding opportunities are announced.

Professional writing group. The site directors and two TCs continued to participate in a professional writing group in fall 2019, but this was put on hold due to the pandemic. One of the high school teachers from this group submitted a paper proposal that was accepted for presentation at the November 2020 conference of the National Council of Teachers of English.

Teaching from Your Best Self. OWP teacher-consultant Jay Schroder has drafted a book *Teaching from Your Best Self*, which he plans to submit for publication in the near future. Site director Margaret Perrow provided Jay Schroder with developmental feedback on this manuscript. Including a series of well-designed writing prompts, this book guides teachers to use writing to understand themselves better and bring positive, sustained energy to their teaching. The OWP is supporting him to develop the book into framework for a yearlong institute with a particular focus on supporting new teachers and those who did the majority of their student teaching remotely via Zoom.

"Supporting university faculty as writers." Building on a panel presentation at NCTE in 2018 (organized by Margaret Perrow), four NWP site directors (Perrow, Richard Louth, Amy Lannin, David Franke) began discussions in fall 2020 about collaborating on an edited volume on approaches to supporting faculty as writers. A preliminary search of existing literature got underway, but this project was also sidelined by the pandemic as all four of us were suddenly swamped with the demands of remote teaching.

District and community relationships

Stories of Southern Oregon: Oral History for Teachers. Building on our 2018 teacher workshop on oral history, SOU affiliate faculty Maureen Battistella (of Stories of Southern Oregon) secured a small grant to support Eagle Point High School TC, Cassie Costa, to develop online curriculum for teachers and showcase student videos. In September 2019, Margaret Perrow was interviewed by education journalist Liz Duffrin. The OWP was featured in a story on the National Writing Project website: <https://www.nwp.org/stories/teachers-team-with-documentarians-to-help-students-tell-and->

[record-stories-of-southern-oregon](#). This work in Eagle Point is continuing, and we hope to report on it in 2021.

Medford School District. In fall 2020, both of the site directors and camps coordinator Cliff Cowley met with administrators from the Medford School District to solidify young authors' camps partnership. The district continues to provide support for camps in the form of classroom space, photocopying, email marketing.

Southern Oregon Regional Educators Network (SOREN). This body of teachers and community leaders is charged with creating a plan for distributing state funding (from the Student Success Act) to equity-focused professional learning for teachers in southern Oregon. Site director Margaret Perrow has a strong relationship with SOREN, which is a possible source of funding for a 2021 institute. (The RFP process was delayed by the pandemic, but should be in place in 2021.)

Site “continuity” activities

Annual renewal meeting (January 17, 2020). Ten people attended, heard a report on 2018-19 events, and discussed plans for 2019-20, including the proposed equity-focused institute. TC Amy Sayre expressed interest in coordinating a multi-day writing retreat for teachers, and Jay Schroder discussed his desire to support and sustain teachers (which manifested in his book *Teaching from Your Best Self*, discussed above).

Website and Facebook. These were minimally maintained in 2019-20. This is one of our challenges, since during the pandemic these are our best vehicles for staying connected with teachers.

III. Concluding Thoughts: Looking forward

Our goals for 2020-21 include some carryovers from 2019-20:

- Design and implement an equity-focused summer institute for 2021, possibly geared to Advanced Southern Credit (dual-credit) teachers;
- Work with TC Jay Schroder to develop and fund an institute to begin in late summer 2021 and continue through the school year, with a special focus on supporting new teachers who did much of their student teaching in a remote (Zoom) environment;
- Plan a follow-up workshop with Linda Christensen focused on poetry and social justice;
- Connect local teachers and SOU faculty with #WriteOut or Writing Marathon, low-cost engaging professional learning and community;
- Build on the momentum of expanded and more diverse summer writing camps; continue to grow camps both in terms of camp diversity and camper diversity;
- Award Teacher Leadership badges to former institute participants and current camp leaders.

Longer-term and ongoing goals include:

- Investigate the possibility of a graduate certificate in literacy or teaching writing (check with TSPC, other universities, etc.)
- When we can gather in person again, start hosting regular faculty-writing gatherings at the Faculty Writing House, including OWP TCs;

- Communicate more effectively about the work of our site to university and community audiences, including a stronger, more regular social media presence;
- Think about the role OWP might play in supporting teachers, as SB13 is implemented in Oregon schools.

By fostering relationships with teachers and administrators, providing a variety of teacher-led professional development, offering affordable young-authors' camps, and maintaining active partnerships with a wide range of institutions and organizations, the OWP strives to contribute directly to the university's mission as a thriving regional university with strong and sustainable connections to K-12 teachers and schools. Under the leadership of President Linda Schott, the University has articulated a mission of being a "regionally engaged learning community" that promotes "responsible global citizenship" by supporting teachers' professional development in their classrooms *and* as leaders in their schools.

Given sufficient support (course release time for site directors), the OWP is uniquely positioned at Southern Oregon University to promote connections between K-12 and university programs and instruction, a current priority of both the state of Oregon and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. The projects and goals described above reflect the desire of the OWP at SOU to contribute meaningfully to the mission of the university, as well as the professional development needs of teachers regionally at all stages of their careers, and the field of English language arts more broadly.

For more information, visit www.sou.edu/owp or email owp@sou.edu.