

## Oregon Writing Project at SOU 2015-16 NWP Site Report

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### I. The Current Context of the Site

Southern Oregon University (SOU) is a small regional public university serving an extensive geographic area of the state, including over a dozen school districts. 2015-16 was our fourth year of re-affiliation with the National Writing Project<sup>1</sup>.

The work of the Oregon Writing Project (OWP) in 2015-16 focused on four priorities identified in the 2014-15 site report<sup>2</sup>:

- Continue to pilot and refine small-scale classes and workshops to meet the needs of teachers (both pre-service and in-service), and increase site visibility in the region;
- Continue to build site leadership and teacher-consultant (TC) expertise;
- Foster OWP connections with SOU administrators and campus programs, to better support SOU needs and priorities;
- Secure sufficient funding and/or university support to cover two course releases (the equivalent of one class in fall 2015 and one in spring 2016) to support the work of the site director in 2016-17.

We achieved all four of these objectives in 2015-16. In addition, we launched the Teaching Argument-Writing Collaborative (TAWC), a yearlong professional development initiative that will extend through 2016-17, supported by Title IIA University-School Partnership funding. Part 2 below provides information about our 2015-16 activities.

Securing university support for the director's course release time (priority 4 above) continues to be a challenge, in an uncertain period at our university and statewide in higher education. Southern Oregon University is now entering its third year in 'retrenchment' status, with more budget cuts and reductions probable.

Given these uncertainties, we are pleased that the OWP site director currently has two course releases for the academic year 2016-17, with a third release supported by the Title IIA grant referenced above (specifically for administering the grant and overseeing TAWC during the academic year). This support is due in part to ongoing efforts by the site director to meet with the provost, the associate vice provost for academic resource management, and the president, keeping them informed of the OWP's ongoing work both on and off campus. It is also due to the OWP's

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Download [annual reports from previous years](#) from the OWP website.

strong relationships with other programs on campus, including the School of Education and University Studies (USem and House programs), as we continue to collaborate with these programs to provide professional development in writing instruction that meets the needs of multiple constituents: SOU faculty, pre-service teachers, and K-12 teachers from surrounding districts.

The Division of Humanities & Culture and the Division of Education, Health & ROTC currently each provide one course release annually to the OWP director, for a total of two releases spread over three quarters (approximately 12% of the director's loading). Several factors make this support from two separate divisions on campus relevant. Joint support reflects the OWP's long history of productive inter-departmental partnerships on campus. This joint support also established our eligibility for the Title IIA federal University-School Partnership grant awarded in spring 2016. (These grants typically require collaboration among a school/district, a school of education, and a third division on the university campus.)

Part of the work of the site director in 2015-16 involved communicating to the university administration *about* our work, and explaining how the OWP enacts SOU's mission of "responsible global citizenship" by directly supporting teachers' professional development in their classrooms *and* as leaders in their schools. Ongoing active outreach to the administration is key to the vitality of the OWP moving forward, and to our ability to contribute to the mission and vision of the university as they are revised and re-focused under the leadership of our new president in 2016-17.

The OWP plays a key role in linking SOU with teachers in our extensive geographic region, supporting their development throughout their careers. Many of these teachers begin their careers as undergraduate English Education majors at SOU, enroll in the MAT program, and complete their student teaching in classrooms of OWP teacher-consultants. The OWP director teaches 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. Her multiple roles help to facilitate SOU's outreach to practicing teachers as they move through their careers, continue their professional development as required by the Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission, and in turn become mentors to pre-service teachers. This connectivity, or sense of professional 'home' throughout their careers that the OWP affords to teachers, is part of the vision we hold for the OWP.

The OWP also plays a key role in linking teachers with their colleagues. Summer institutes are one way we do this; in summer 2015 a weeklong intensive institute launched the Teaching Argument-Writing Collaborative. Saturday seminar series and other workshops also create opportunities for teachers to learn from each others' experience and practice – both as participants in colleagues' workshops, and as facilitators themselves.

The OWP site director continues to work closely with the division director of Education, to provide offerings that simultaneously meet the needs of multiple constituents (e.g., MAT students, M.Ed. students, undergraduate English and Education majors, in-service teachers who need graduate credits, and in-service teachers who simply need professional development hours to renew their teaching license). The site director appreciates the creative and collaborative support of the School of Education in this process — and has been helping formalize a process so that other campus organizations can offer workshops that meet multiple constituents' needs.

A new SOU board began governance in summer 2015. Its first significant task was the hiring of a new university president, Dr. Linda Schott, who arrived on campus in August 2016. Dr. Schott has

indicated in public forums that she will prioritize university-community partnerships. The OWP is optimistic that the energy and focus that Dr. Schott brings to campus will help the university articulate a clear mission that includes community connections, and supports active engagement with our K-12 colleagues. The values and practices of the OWP at SOU are strongly aligned with the university's core commitment (as stated in 2015 on the [SOU website](#)) to “partnerships, public service, outreach, sustainable practice and activities that address regional needs such as health and human services, business, and education.” This is a vision that the OWP actively supports: a thriving regional university with strong connections to K-12 teachers and schools.

## II. The Work of the Writing Project

The OWP at SOU offered a variety of workshops, seminars, camps, and other activities in 2015-16. Modest fees charged for many of these events made them largely self-sustaining, and provided sufficient revenue to cover the site director's travel costs to the annual NWP director's meeting, the annual site affiliation fee, and miscellaneous site expenses. (In general, we don't 'make' money; we tend to just break even, balancing revenue and expenses.) After two successful Literacy Leadership institutes (funded by SEED teacher-leadership and professional development grants) in summers 2014 and 2015, we did not offer a traditional summer institute in 2016. Instead, we launched what will become the centerpiece of our work in 2016-17: the Teaching Argument-Writing Collaborative (TAWC). This exciting university-school partnership is fully funded by a Title IIA professional development grant (see below for details).

### **Teaching Argument-Writing Collaborative (TAWC)**

Launched in summer 2016, the Teaching Argument-Writing Collaborative (TAWC) is an ambitious professional development initiative that will extend through the academic year 2016-17. TAWC brings together 29 middle and high school teachers, and seven SOU faculty, in a yearlong collaborative dedicated to improving the teaching of argument-writing across subject areas and grade levels—and ultimately to improving student writing in an area critical for academic success and productive civic engagement.

Funded by a \$163,000 Title IIA University-School Partnership Grant, TAWC was collaboratively designed by the Oregon Writing Project at SOU, the Ashland and Medford school districts, and the School of Education at SOU. (OWP director Margaret Perrow wrote the grant application in fall 2015.) Grant funding supports 90 hours of professional development in 2016-17; approximately half of these hours took place in summer 2016, beginning with a 40-hour weeklong intensive institute in June, and a full-day workshop devoted to argument-specific rubric development in August. (The remaining sessions will be spread throughout 2016-17 in a series of Saturday workshops, culminating in an April 2017 teacher-led conference on teaching argument-writing, which will be open to all area teachers.)

The group comprises teachers from 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, in subjects including English, physics, social studies, music, and art. Many are experienced teachers with nearly 20 years in the classroom; others have just begun their careers. They share an enthusiasm for honing their teaching practice, and a desire to continue learning with and from their colleagues. The seven SOU faculty participants are as excited to collaborate with their middle and high school counterparts, as they are to share

expertise in their disciplines. Participating SOU faculty come from English, University Studies/USem, Anthropology, Philosophy, Education, and Chemistry.

The initial institute June 20-24 was facilitated by Dr. Margaret Perrow with co-facilitation by a high school teacher from Ashland and a middle school teacher from Medford. The institute focused on developing a solid, collaborative learning community across disciplines and grade-levels; developing a shared language of argument pedagogy; introducing argument-specific instructional strategies that can be adapted across contexts; forming smaller teams of teachers based on discipline or grade level; and setting the tone for a year of collaborative, teacher-led, hands-on professional development. Each SOU faculty member led at least one workshop or session from his or her disciplinary perspective. At the conclusion of the weeklong institute, all 35 participants developed and presented specific plans for incorporating argument-writing into their 2016-17 curriculum and instruction, in authentic, discipline-specific ways. (Some teachers are working solo, some in pairs, and some in teams that cross grade levels and schools.)

Pre- and post-institute surveys included qualitative and quantitative questions about the impact of the summer institute. Overall, teachers reported significant growth in understanding the elements of argument-writing, the grade-level progression of Common Core State Standard W.1, the difference between various types of argument, and the relationship between evidence and claim. They also reported greatly increased confidence in their ability to help students understand and incorporate multiple viewpoints into their arguments. Written comments about the summer institute were extremely positive; a random sample from seven teachers is representative:

*This exceeded my high expectations!  
Effective and inspiring collaboration.  
The best professional development I have ever participated in.  
I've learned a lot that I can put into use next year.  
This week has truly revived my energy and my enthusiasm.  
I'm looking at my year with new eyes!  
The collaboration of educators was phenomenal.*

It is worth noting that the argument-writing focus and approach of this intensive, sustained professional development grew out of smaller-scale workshops (daylong, and 30-hour evening/Saturday series) that the OWP had been developing and offering between 2013-2015. IN addition, ten TAWC teachers are teacher consultants who have participated in a past OWP summer intensive institute; one is OWP site co-director, a 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at Wilson Elementary in Medford. TAWC serves as a vehicle for these teacher leaders to further build their teacher leadership and teacher-consultant expertise.

### **Open classes and workshops**

**“Teaching argument” seminars 2015-16.** This seminar was offered twice in 2015-16 as a six-Saturday workshop series. The first session was taught by site director Margaret Perrow at the Higher Education Center in Medford. A second Saturday series was taught in Klamath Falls by OWP teacher consultant (Phoenix HS teacher) Kelly Singleton, who had participated in a similar seminar in 2013, and then co-facilitated it in 2014. Participants had the option of taking the seminar for three graduate credits transcribed as part of an SOU graduate program (MAT or M.Ed., regular tuition rates applied), or as a workshop (for a workshop fee, earning professional development units OR optional reduced-rate graduate credits that did not count toward a degree

program). Of the 27 teachers and pre-service teachers who took one of these workshops in 2015-16, 13 earned three graduate credits for ED500 or ED507.

**“Grammar-Writing Connection for Teachers.”** Affectionately known as “grammar camp,” this summer 2016 weeklong intensive workshop for teachers of grades 6-college emphasized practical and engaging activities to show the power of embracing grammar instruction in the context of students’ reading and writing. Participants explored grammatical structures and punctuation as rhetorical choices, and developed strategies for helping students expand their repertoires, confidence, and pleasure in writing. Grounded in research, activities moved beyond conventional parts of speech to address sentence crafting; style and voice; “grammar myths;” joining and expanding sentences; and issues of error and correctness.

Offered for 30 professional development units for a workshop fee, or as ED507 for three regular-price credits. (OWP worked with the School of Education to ensure that MAT students could apply this course as a program elective.) Participants included four SOU faculty (USem/House and International Programs), three MAT students, and eight practicing K-12 teachers. Nine of the 15 participants earned three graduate credits each (ED500 or ED507).

### **Targeted professional development**

**Advanced Southern Credit (ASC) professional development** for teachers of English language arts that award SOU credits in English (104/105, 121/122). OWP regularly provides workshops for these teachers, who are required to participate in annual professional development to maintain their ASC eligibility. The April 2016 workshop, held on the SOU campus, focused on “Using criteria and definitions to strengthen arguments of judgment.”

### **Student-centered projects with a professional development component**

**Digital Storytelling Project, Ruch School.** Spring 2016. This eight-week digital storytelling project, funded by a contract with the school’s PTO, took place in a middle school language arts class. Lead teacher and OWP TC Abram Katz mentored four SOU undergraduate education majors, who served as classroom assistants and co-teachers. The middle school students wrote and revised stories that became voiceover soundtracks for short movies. The four SOU elementary education majors, along with four of the middle school students, presented the project to an audience at SOAR on the SOU campus in May 2016.

The students’ projects can be viewed at <https://ruchschoolwriters.wordpress.com/> (password: spring2015). A complete description of this project and its outcomes (including reports to the PTO and [a short video clip](#) of an intern describing the project) is available on [the OWP website](#).

**First grade authors.** Spring 2016. This annual eight-week project at Ruch K-8 Community School is funded by the school’s PTO. The first-grade teacher received classroom coaching from the OWP, and in turn mentored an SOU undergraduate elementary-education major who assisted with the students’ writing process. The project culminated in the first-grade students reading at an authors’ reception at the Jackson County Ruch Branch Library, to kick off Summer Reading Programs. (All the students received free copies of their books.) [View a brief video of students talking about the writing and publishing process](#), from the 2014 project, or read a brief article in the local paper *The Applegater* from spring 2016 ([click here and flip to pp. 22-23](#)).

**Young Authors Camps and Reading/Reception.** Summer 2016. Two one-week summer camps were held this year in Medford (at Hedrick Middle School) and Ashland (at Ashland Middle School). At the long-established Medford camp, the lead teacher (an OWP TC) mentored two early-career/pre-service teachers and two junior counselors (former campers) who served as assistants. In Ashland, an OWP teacher consultant mentored a new middle school teacher in planning and organizing the camp.

A reading and authors' reception for summer 2016 campers is scheduled for October 20, 2016 in Hannon Library on the SOU campus. Campers will read a selection of their writing, and will receive a free copy of the summer 2016 *Wordscapes* anthology. Additional copies may be purchased directly from [thebookpatch.com](http://thebookpatch.com). (Approximately 85 family members and friends attended the fall 2015 reading and reception.)

**Scholastic Adjudication and Teachers' Writing Retreat.** In winter 2016, the OWP served as an adjudication site for the Scholastic Inc. student writing competition. Student teachers in the MAT program and middle/high school teachers from our region judged student submissions to this national contest, gaining experience reading and scoring exemplary student writing at the secondary level. Graduate students were paid a stipend for adjudicating; practicing teachers who adjudicated attended a weekend writing retreat for teachers in spring 2016, funded with Scholastic proceeds and organized/facilitated by OWP teacher consultants.

### University-based initiatives

**Faculty Writing Fellows Seminar.** After passing review of the SOU Faculty Senate and the student government in spring 2015, the proposal for this seminar was approved in summer 2015 for implementation beginning in September 2015, funded by the Student Success Initiative at SOU. The focus of the seminar was on supporting faculty in designing and implementing effective writing instruction in first-year courses.

Nine SOU instructors (from USem, House, and International Programs) participated in this yearlong professional development series, consisting of 2-1/2 days in September (facilitated by OWP TC Anne Beaufort, author of *College Writing and Beyond*), followed by six sessions distributed through the academic year with shared facilitation by site director Margaret Perrow and Anne Beaufort). Faculty received a stipend for participating; participants applied seminar readings and activities to their own curriculum projects, as well as a case study of a student writer. The report on the impact and results of this seminar is being prepared in collaboration with SOURCE, and will be available in late fall 2016.

Based partly on data collected during this yearlong seminar and analyzed with the help of Eva Skuratowicz at the SOU Center for Research and Evaluation (SOURCE), a report was provided by Anne Beaufort to University Studies director Lee Ayers and USem Chair Deb Brown in August 2016. Titled "Assessment of Writing Instruction in USem," this report outlines strengths of the program, as well as areas for improvement, and makes specific USem program recommendations based on detailed analysis of course descriptions, rubrics, syllabi, assignments, interviews with instructors, and student writing.

**Klamath Falls Community College (KCC) contracts.** Based on requests from a colleague at Klamath Community College (KCC is approximately a 1.5 hour drive from SOU), in 2015-16 we submitted proposals for three week-long workshops to be facilitated by OWP teacher consultants for Klamath Falls teachers: “The Grammar-Writing Connection,” “Teaching Argument Writing,” and “Introduction to Writer’s Workshop.” These workshops are designed to provide teacher-leadership opportunities for OWP TCs, as well as access to OWP professional development for teachers in Klamath Falls. These proposals resulted in one six-Saturday class (Teaching argument-writing, see above). A second contract (“Grammar in context”) was put in place, but cancelled at the last minute due to low enrollment. We hope to work out a better system for promoting such classes in 2016-17, now that Barbara Stoutamore (a KCC instructor) is serving as the OWP’s KCC liaison. See “Report to KCC 2016.”

### Scholarship and conference presentations

In fall 2015, site director Margaret Perrow, in collaboration with two TCs from the OWP summer 2014 Literacy Leadership Institute, presented a workshop for teachers at the joint conference of OCTE/Oregon Council of the Social Studies in Portland, OR. This two-hour workshop, “Hidden histories and alter-egos: Narrative as a platform for argument-writing,” drew a large and enthusiastic group of attendees.

In November, 2015 the OWP site director attended the annual NWP site directors meeting in Minneapolis, where she led a round table discussion for site leaders on “Innovative ways to engage your university in the work of the Writing Project.”

In spring 2016, site director Margaret Perrow submitted a collaborative proposal, with six SOU faculty, to the 2017 CCCC conference in March 2017. The proposal for a panel presentation, drawing on the work and findings of the 2015-16 Faculty Writing Fellows Seminar at SOU, was titled “Understanding our teaching practice through the lens of our students’ struggles: Cultivating faculty capacity with collaborative learning.” Although the proposal was not accepted for presentation at the prestigious national conference, it reflects the collaborative, reflective, and engaged stance of the Faculty Writing Fellows at SOU, and it may well be worth turning into a co-authored journal article in the future.

### III. Concluding Thoughts

Out of our work over the past two years, several big ideas emerge:

#### **The importance of designing programming to meet multiple needs simultaneously**

A priority continues to be finding ways to meet the needs of multiple constituents simultaneously (e.g., in-service teachers, pre-service teachers, MAT students, the OWP, and the university). Workshops like “Teaching Argument Writing” and “The Grammar-Writing Connection” are examples of K-college programming that effectively engages multiple constituents.

Offering a choice of regular graduate tuition or professional development units for a workshop fee creates a win-win-win situation for SOU, OWP, and participating teachers: the course generates enrollment numbers and revenue for the university, MAT students can take electives alongside more

experienced colleagues, and teachers who don't need graduate credits for continuing licensure are able to participate at lower cost, simultaneously generating workshop revenue that directly supports the work of the OWP.

Because this approach requires flexibility on the part of administrators, the OWP continues to work with the School of Education to design courses that are 'flexible:' that are taught as part of a faculty member's regular loading when appropriate; that count as electives in the graduate programs; and that are also open to in-service teachers whether they are seeking lower-cost graduate credits, or simply a low-cost workshop.

### **The importance of engaging creatively with the needs of the host university**

A landmark in summer 2015 was the participation of the director of University Studies in the OWP summer Literacy Leadership Institute. It's one thing to explain to administrators what the Writing Project does; it's another thing altogether for an administrator to experience Writing Project principles in action. Dr. Ayers' participation led her to support the SOU Faculty Writing Fellows Institute, and to encourage USem instructors to enroll in other OWP workshops in 2015-16. She has also expressed interest in seeking funding for OWP initiatives that meet the K-college collaboration goals of the Oregon Department of Education.

Other critical relationships that support the work of the OWP are with the division directors of Education & Health, and Humanities & Culture. The better those administrators understand how the mission and capacity of the OWP supports that of the university, the better advocates they are for the two annual course releases that enable the work of the site director.

In addition to external grant funding to support programs and workshops, the survival of the Writing Project at SOU depends on sufficient course release time for the site director to plan programming, write grants, and oversee the work outlined in this report. The cost of two annual course releases to support the work of the site director is relatively small in light of what the OWP contributes to the university, so it is important to raise the visibility of the Writing Project, as we work in alignment with the university's mission.

### **The importance (and challenges) of distributing site leadership**

As site director, my greatest learning and growth has been in the area of collaborating and distributing leadership. Not only has this process become personally and professionally rewarding, but it has clearly allowed us to increase visibility and grow as a Writing Project site.

Over the past two years, I have been fortunate to have the hardworking collaboration of TC and co-director Andra Hollenbeck—especially in planning and facilitating summer institutes. This fall 2016, we are again looking forward to attending the National site directors' meeting together.

Many other TCs helped expand the work of the site in 2015-16, by taking on leadership roles including:

- Teaching the six-Saturday argument seminar in Klamath Falls (Kelly Singleton)
- Serving as Klamath Falls OWP liaison (Barbara Stoutamore)
- Designing "Introduction to Writers' Workshop" (Rick Taylor)
- Preparing to teach "Grammar in context" in Klamath Falls (Jeanne Curty)
- Co-designing and co-facilitating the SOU Faculty Writing Fellows institute (Anne Beaufort)

- Helping design, advertise, and facilitate the Teaching Argument-Writing Collaborative (Jamie Hirsh, David Brown)
- Planning teachers' writing retreat (Amy Woods, Ellie Misner-Smith)
- Helping coordinate the young authors' camps and assemble anthology (student worker)

One of our biggest challenges is finding ways to compensate TCs for their work. All of the leadership outlined directly above was compensated (through grants, contracts, workshop fees, etc.). In addition, all participants in TAWC and Faculty Writing Fellows Seminar received stipends. The OWP believes that it is important to compensate teachers for their leadership, as well as their investment in their professional development, whenever possible. We continue to seek ways to balance affordable/free professional development for local teachers, with the need to compensate teachers for their time and work.

Some of the (voluntary) leadership roles eagerly assumed by 2014 Leadership Institute participants have languished as TCs got swept away in the rush and press of the school year. Among these are a social media coordinator, and a teachers' writing group coordinator.

### Looking forward

Based on the above issues, our goals for 2016-17 include:

- Continue to plan and implement small-scale classes and workshops to meet the needs of teachers (both pre-service and in-service), and increase site visibility in the region;
- Seek funding for summer "Literacy Leadership" institutes (2016, 2017) to continue building teacher leadership regionally;
- Continue fostering OWP connections with SOU administrators, to better support SOU needs and priorities, including *investigating the feasibility of offering a graduate certificate in teaching writing at SOU*;
- Expand the work of TAWC in 2017, by collaborating with GEAR UP and/or seeking funding from College Ready Writers for advanced professional development in teaching argument-writing;
- Document and disseminate the work of TAWC (at ORATE, AERA, or other venues) as a unique model showing the power of an intensive, sustained university-school collaboration that crosses disciplines and grade levels, and links professional development to practice in meaningful ways. *This includes the TAWC conference in April 2016, where teachers will share demonstration lessons and presentations with colleagues from around the region.*

The OWP is uniquely positioned 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 Committee. Taken together, the workshops, programs, proposals, presentations, professional development, and camps described above reflect the desire and capacity 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](http://www.sou.edu/owp) or email [owp@sou.edu](mailto:owp@sou.edu).