

2015 Report to the National Writing Project

Oregon Writing Project at SOU



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OR Oregon Writing Project at SOU 2015 NWP Site Report

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I. The Current Context of the Site

Southern Oregon University is a small regional public university serving an extensive geographic area of the state, including over a dozen school districts. 2014-15 was our third year of re-affiliation with the National Writing Project¹.

The work of our site this year focused on four priorities for long-term strategic planning, all of which extend from the priorities identified in our 2013 and 2014 site reports:

- 1) 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.**
- 2) Continue to build site leadership and teacher-consultant (TC) expertise, offering a second Literacy Leadership Institute in summer 2015.**
- 3) Strengthen OWP connections with SOU administrators, to better support SOU needs and priorities.**
- 4) 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 2015-16.**

We achieved all four of these objectives this year. Part II below provides information about classes, workshops, connections with other programs and divisions on the SOU campus, and our summer 2015 Literacy Leadership Institute. Although once again implemented on a relatively small scale, workshops and institute alike were well attended and successful (see below). The concerted focus on priorities 1-3 above has generated a new ‘buzz’ around OWP programs, both on campus and in surrounding school districts; we hope to hear the volume of that buzz increase over the next year.

Securing university support for the director’s course release time (priority 4 above) continues to be a challenge, in a very uncertain period at our university and statewide in higher education. In the wake of SOU’s 2012-13 ‘prioritization’ and ‘reorganization’ initiatives, course releases not directly funded by revenue to the university are jeopardized. Southern Oregon University is now entering its second year in ‘retrenchment’ status, with more budget cuts and reductions probable. Further complicating the context, the Oregon State University system itself has recently reorganized, with each small regional university forming its own new governing board; the SOU board began governance in

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

summer 2015. Its first significant task will be to form a search committee for a university president, to take over when our interim president completes his term next summer.

Meanwhile, SOU's interim president Roy Saigo clearly articulates the university's mission, including community connections and 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 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, one that will lead to a thriving regional university with strong collaborative connections to K-12 teachers and schools.

Increasingly, the work of the site director involves communicating to the university administration *about* our work, and explaining how the OWP carries out SOU's stated mission of "responsible global citizenship" by directly supporting teachers' professional development in their classrooms *and* as leaders in their schools. SOU's president and provost have both visited our summer institute, addressed participating teachers, and voiced appreciation for the work of the OWP in furthering those collaborative connections. In addition, three of the university's division directors (Education & Health, Humanities & Culture, and University Studies) have attended or participated in OWP events, and expressed their support. We view ongoing active outreach to the administration as key to the vitality of the OWP, and to our ability to contribute to the mission of the university. (At our February 2015 renewal meeting, we compiled a [book of Valentines to the SOU administration](#).)

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 & Writing and Education programs, and supervises student teachers placed in secondary schools. 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 become mentors to pre-service teachers. This connectivity, or sense of professional 'home' throughout their careers that the OWP affords to teachers, is one of the values 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. As we develop Saturday seminar series and other workshops (e.g., "Teaching Argument," "The Grammar-Writing Connection," and "Introduction to Writers' Workshop"), we create opportunities for teachers to learn from each others' experience and practice – both as participants in colleagues' workshops, and as workshop facilitators themselves.

The Division of Humanities & Culture and the Division of Education, Health & ROTC currently each provide one (10-week quarter) course release annually to the OWP director, for a total of two releases spread over three quarters (approximately 12% of the director's official allocation). 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. It also establishes eligibility for state and federal "partnership" grants, such as Title IIA grants that require collaboration among a school/district, a school of education, and a third department on the university campus. A strong connection with our School of Education positions the OWP well to collaborate

with faculty working on a variety of educational initiatives in our region, including STEM-related initiatives and pre-service teacher education.

An important new collaboration, with a third academic division on campus, is with University Studies. The division director of University Studies participated in the 2015 Literacy Leadership Institute, giving her an inside look at the Writing Project model at work in southern Oregon. The division director subsequently actively supported an OWP proposal to provide professional development in writing instruction, based on Writing Project principles, for SOU faculty who teach the first-year “University Seminar” class on campus. (See “Faculty Writing Fellows” below.)

The OWP site director continues to work closely with the division director of Education, to provide continuing education offerings that can 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 in turn has been asked to help formalize a process so that other campus organizations can offer workshops that meet multiple constituents’ needs.

We are working to actively engage the OWP with other programs and departments on campus, and align our efforts (with other programs, and the broader university mission) wherever possible. Much of our work in 2014-15 was directed toward this alignment, as the following section illustrates.

II. The Work of the Writing Project

The OWP at SOU sponsored a variety of workshops, seminars, camps, and other activities in 2014-15. Modest fees charged for 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 meeting², annual site fees, and miscellaneous site expenses. In addition, an NWP “high-needs school grant” funded a schoolwide professional development initiative at a rural K-8 school, and the second installment of a SEED grant funded our 2015 intensive summer institute. We don’t ‘make’ money, but we tend to just break even.

Intensive summer institute

Literacy Leadership Institute. Summer 2015. Three-week intensive, invitational institute devoted to developing teachers’ writing, teaching, and leadership skills. Twelve elementary, secondary, and college teachers participated as Summer Fellows. Co-facilitated by OWP site director Margaret Perrow, and site co-director TC Andra Hollenbeck. Supported by the second \$10,000 installment of a two-year federal SEED grant. Participants earned 84 professional development hours, or had the option of registering for three graduate credits in fall 2015 (follow-up curriculum project required). In addition to demonstration lessons by each participant, we had visits from five TCs, two of whom were participants in our 2014 institute.

One focus of the institute was on a *genre* approach to writing instruction, to help give authentic life to the three rhetorical modes in the Common Core (argument, narrative, and information):

² In fall 2015, both the site director and co-director will attend the annual Site Directors’ Meeting in Minneapolis.

authentic, real-world genres defy such simplistic division, and often draw on more than one rhetorical mode. One genre we tackled, which was new to many participants, was the blog post. One participant took responsibility for blogging each day, documenting our journey (<https://owpliteracyleadershipinstitute2015.wordpress.com/>). Despite some trepidation and anxiety, often around technology, the blog posts surprised us all in their creativity and variety!

One of the high-leverage aspects of this institute was the participation of an SOU administrator, the director of the division of University Studies, who also serves on the Oregon Department of Education's Higher Education Coordination Committee (HECC). She expressed enthusiasm for the level of trust and collaboration that was built during our three weeks. She subsequently endorsed an OWP proposal for funding to support faculty professional development on campus (see "Faculty Writing Fellows" below), and I look forward to collaborating with her and the SOU provost on future OWP professional development that furthers the broader K-college collaborative emphasis of the Oregon HECC.

The division directors of Education & Health, and Humanities & Culture both paid a visit to the institute, welcoming teachers (and participating in a portion of a demonstration lesson). The provost and the director of Marketing and Communications were invited; they stayed to hear several teachers read their writing. This outreach to administrators allowed us to connect the summer institute with the larger institutional context, and positioned the OWP to better contribute to the K-college collaboration that the Oregon Department of Education is promoting.

Adjectives participants used to describe the institute in post-reflections include *revolutionary*, *valuable*, *rich*, *wonderful*, *exceptional*, and *challenging and nurturing*. A collection of participants' writing was published in a small anthology. A follow-up meeting is scheduled for October 9, 2015, when we will plan ongoing leadership activities, including Saturday workshops.

'Open' classes and workshops

"Teaching argument" seminar 2014-15. Eight two-hour sessions were held during the academic year. This seminar was co-facilitated by two TCs who had participated in a previous "Teaching argument" seminar, facilitated by the OWP site director in 2013-14. Participants paid a workshop fee (\$130), and had the option of earning two reduced-rate graduate credits. Thirteen teachers of grades 5-community college participated.

"Teaching argument-writing" one-day workshop, October 2014. This one-day workshop reviewed the basic elements of argument, and introduced a 'structured process' approach to teaching argument-writing to meet the Common Core Standards in language arts and social studies, grades 6-12. The morning included a hands-on introduction to supporting claims with evidence and warrants. In the afternoon, we explored ways to help students understand and incorporate competing viewpoints into their arguments. Emphasis was on framing real-world problems that are meaningful to student writers, and developing assignments in real-world genres of writing that require argumentative skills.

Participants paid a \$65 workshop fee, and had the option of earning one reduced-rate graduate credit. Twenty-four teachers participated in this one-day workshop, which was co-facilitated by the site director and two TCs (who went on to plan and facilitate the eight-session argument seminar described above).

“Introduction to Writer’s Workshop.” This one-week workshop for teachers (upper-elementary and middle school) was designed and facilitated in August 2015 by an OWP TC with many years’ experience teaching elementary and middle school. The workshop emphasized strategies for rich, authentic writing instruction even when using prescribed curricula. Participants called this workshop *powerful, inspiring, amazing, practical, and exceeding my expectations*. One wrote, “For the first time I can see myself as a writer, and a capable teacher of writing.”

Workshop fee: \$250. Three optional credits (graduate/undergraduate) were offered at a reduced rate, or 30 professional development hours. The ten participants included seven in-service teachers, one MAT student, one substitute teacher, and one undergraduate English education major. (A follow-up will be offered in fall 2015, including a revising/feedback workshop and an individualized coaching session for each participant.)

“Grammar-Writing Connection for Teachers.” Affectionately known as “grammar camp,” this summer 2015 weeklong intensive workshop for teachers of grades 6-college emphasized practical and engaging activities to show the power of embracing grammar instruction. Participants explored grammatical structures and punctuation as rhetorical choices, and developed strategies for helping students expand their repertoires, confidence, and pleasure in writing. Activities are grounded in research, and move 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 (workshop fee \$295), or as ED407/507 for three regular-price credits. Fourteen participants included four in-service teachers, seven MAT students from SOU, one undergraduate English major, and two prospective MAT students fulfilling program prerequisites. (OWP worked with the School of Education to ensure that MAT students could apply this course as a program elective.)

Targeted professional development

“Argue with Me”: Professional development in a high-needs school. A \$20,000 SEED grant supported schoolwide professional development in opinion/argument writing, for all seven teachers and the principal at Ruch K-8 School, a small rural school in southern Oregon. Professional development was facilitated by the OWP site director. Staff met as a group eight times during the year, to experience argument-writing and teaching, discuss research/theory, and share practices across grade levels and subjects. The grant also purchased materials and resources related to teaching argument-writing. In summer 2015, the whole staff participated in a retreat to consolidate their learning, and to develop a coherent schoolwide plan for teaching argument across grade levels in 2015-16.

All students’ end-of-year opinion/argument responses to a schoolwide prompt were published in a book *Welcome to Ruch*, to display in the school office for visitors. This book shows the developmental progression of the CCSS opinion/argument-writing standard W.1 across grade levels. (Book is available for purchase in paperback or e-book format from theBookpatch.com.)

Professional development session for Advanced Southern Credit (ASC) teachers of English language arts: “From annotating to summarizing.” February, 2015. This session, derived from the teaching-argument workshops described above, was part of a professional development workshop held on the SOU campus, for teachers of high school classes that award SOU credits. (Although this was not an OWP event *per se*, it is included here because it was facilitated by the OWP site director. Also, the ASC program for ELA teachers is overseen by an SOU faculty member in English, and we see a possibility for strong collaboration with the OWP in the future.)

Student-centered projects with a professional development component

Digital Storytelling Project, Ruch School. Spring 2015. This year’s eight-week digital storytelling project, once again funded by a contract with the school’s PTO, took place in a mixed-grade middle school language arts class. Lead teacher and OWP TC Abram Katz mentored four SOU undergraduate education majors, who worked as classroom assistants and co-teachers helping to create an environment where the middle school students could feel comfortable writing and sharing stories about things that mattered to them personally. (One intern describes the project in [a short video clip](#).)

Students spent several class sessions writing and revising personal stories. These revised stories became the ‘voiceover’ soundtrack for short movies created using Windows Movie Maker. (The stories also became the basis for more formal written arguments after the digital storytelling project was over.) Students shared their completed digital stories with their class and community members at various venues in late spring.

Some of the students’ digital projects, as well as the written arguments that the students subsequently developed, are available at <https://ruchschoolwriters.wordpress.com/> (password: spring2015). For a more complete description of this project and its outcomes, see the short OWP Report to the PTO.

Book-publication for first graders. Spring 2015. This six-week project at Ruch K-8 Community School was funded by the school’s PTO. The first-grade teacher received classroom coaching, and also mentored two SOU undergraduate elementary-education majors, who assisted with the writing process during the project. 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. [Additional copies are available for purchase](#) from theBookpatch.com.) [View a brief video of students talking about the writing and publishing process](#), from the 2014 project.

Young Authors Camps. Summer 2015. Three one-week camps were held this year for a total of 43 elementary and middle school students: Grants Pass (14), Medford middle school (20), and Medford elementary school (9). At the long-established Medford camp, the lead teacher (OWP TC) mentored three early-career or pre-service teachers and two junior counselors (former campers) who served as assistants. The Medford elementary camp teacher mentored a high school student assistant and aspiring future teacher.

At the fall 2014 authors' reception, approximately 70 family members and friends listened to campers read a selection of their writing from the summer 2014 anthology, [Wordscapes 2014](#). Each young author received a free copy of this anthology, which is also available for purchase.³

University-based initiatives

Faculty Writing Fellows proposal for an SOU Student Success Initiative (SSI) grant. This proposal was submitted in spring 2015, to support up to 15 SOU faculty who teach University Studies (formerly 'general education') classes or similar first-year courses. The proposal is based on several premises: faculty need time to share their practices and to experience writing the types of assignments they give students; faculty can benefit from inquiring into research on the teaching of writing, and discussing it with colleagues; and supporting faculty with writing instruction will lead to improved student writing. After passing review of the Faculty Senate and the student government, the proposal was approved in summer 2014 for implementation beginning in September 2015.

The professional development series will consist 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 participants will receive a stipend.

Klamath Falls Community College (KCC) contract proposals. Based on requests from a colleague at Klamath Community College (Klamath Falls is approximately a 1.5 hour drive from SOU), we submitted proposals to KCC for three week-long workshops to be offered to Klamath Falls teachers: "The Grammar-Writing Connection," "Teaching Argument Writing," and "Introduction to Writer's Workshop." These workshops would be facilitated in Klamath Falls by OWP TCs. Once we receive final approval from KCC, we hope to draft formal contracts to offer these workshops either during the academic year 2015-16, or summer 2016.

Conference presentations

The OWP at SOU encourages TCs to make presentations or conduct workshops at professional conferences. In spring 2015, TC Jeanne Curty and site director Margaret Perrow presented a workshop at the Oregon Council of Teachers of English (OCTE) conference in Redmond OR, "Teaching grammar in context". As part of this workshop, Jeanne shared her demonstration lesson from our 2014 Literacy Leadership Institute.

Site director Margaret Perrow, in collaboration with two TCs from our summer 2014 Literacy Leadership Institute, this spring submitted a proposal to the joint conference of OCTE/Oregon Council of the Social Studies. We look forward to co-facilitating a 2-hour workshop "Hidden histories and alter-egos: Narrative as a platform for argument-writing" at the upcoming joint conference for language arts and social studies teachers, in Portland OR on October 3, 2015.

³ A reading and authors' reception for summer 2015 campers is scheduled for October 18, 2015, on the SOU campus. Campers will receive a free copy of the [2015 Wordscapes anthology](#), and may purchase additional copies from thebookpatch.com.

III. Concluding Thoughts

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. Further, 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. Out of our work this year, 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 with their more experienced colleagues, and teachers who didn’t need the graduate credits for continuing licensure are able to participate at lower cost, simultaneously generating workshop revenue that directly supports the work of the OWP. However, this ‘flexible’ approach runs counter to our traditionally rigid university processes and policies.

So we continue 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; that count as electives within the MAT program; 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 turning point for us this year 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 to her support for the SOU Faculty Writing Fellows Institute, and she is currently actively seeking ways to secure funding for OWP initiatives that meet the K-college collaboration goals of the Oregon Department of Education. In a time of retrenchment and reorganization at our university, the survival of the Writing Project at SOU depends on our ability to secure outside funding so that we can continue to leverage the expertise and connections of a university faculty site director, in turn fostering and supporting local teacher leadership.

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.

The cost of two annual course releases may seem relatively small, especially in light of what would be lost if we didn’t have the OWP. Yet in times of retrenchment and reduced funding for public

education, all course releases are ‘suspect’. To this end, it seems important to raise the visibility of the Writing Project, as it works in alignment with the mission of the university.

The importance (and challenges) of distributing site leadership

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 the summer institutes. This fall 2015, we are looking forward to attending the National site directors’ meeting together.

The hard work of other TCs has helped expand the work of the site this year: TCs taught the yearlong argument seminar, took leadership of the high-needs school grant, designed and facilitated “Introduction to Writers’ Workshop” and the opening sessions of the SOU Faculty Writing Fellows institute. And this year, our young authors’ camp coordination was overseen by a TC from the 2014 Literacy Leadership Institute.

Yet other (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. Our young authors’ camp coordination continues to be a challenge: the logistics of facilities, publicity, contracts, and other administrative issues are challenging and time-consuming. We have not yet figured out a functional model for our young authors’ camps, and our 2015 camp coordinator is stepping down this year.

It seems important to compensate teachers for their leadership whenever possible, and unrealistic to expect voluntary services from already-underpaid and overworked professionals. It seems equally unrealistic to expect teachers (who don’t usually have a business ‘bent’) to figure out how to make a program or a workshop financially viable, and ensure that they earn a stipend.

Looking forward

These are ideas and questions we are eager to bring with us to the National Writing Project site directors’ meeting in November 2015. Based on the above issues, our goals for 2015-16 include:

- 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, to better support SOU needs and priorities (including the feasibility of offering a certificate in teaching writing at SOU);
- 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;
- Network and strategize with the other Writing Project sites in Oregon, perhaps during the Oregon Association of Teacher Educators (ORATE) conference in spring 2016.

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