**OR Oregon Writing Project at Southern Oregon University**

**2013 (Fall) NWP Site Report**

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1. The Current Context of Your Site

The Oregon Writing Project at SOU (OWP at SOU) is a newly re-affiliated site of the National Writing Project (NWP). The OWP at SOU has a 20-year history of partnerships with schools and districts in the broad geographic region of Southern Oregon. After a yearlong ‘hiatus’ in 2010-11, we were pleased to re-affiliate in 2011-12, with Margaret Perrow serving as new site director. During the academic year 2012-13, guided by our vision of a vibrant Writing Project continuing to serve southern Oregon teachers and students, we worked on two fronts: engaging in long-term strategic planning, and offering a series of classes and workshops, mostly during summer 2013 (see part II below).

The OWP plays a key role in linking SOU with teachers in our extensive geographic region, supporting their development throughout their careers. These teachers often 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 departments, 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 in their own right to preservice 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.

OWP shares and enacts SOU’s mission of “responsible global citizenship,” which is directly supported by our commitment to teachers’ professional development in their classrooms *and* as leaders in their schools. The values and practices of the OWP at SOU are aligned with the university’s core commitments (as stated on the [SOU website](http://www.sou.edu)) “partnerships, public service, outreach, sustainable practice and activities that address regional needs such as health and human services, business, and education…”

The OWP has active partnerships with:

* The Oregon Council for Teachers of English (OCTE)
* The Oregon Council for the Social Studies
* Advanced Southern Credit (ASC) programs at SOU
* Medford, OR School District 549C
* Phoenix-Talent School District
* Ashland, OR school district
* Southern Oregon Education Service District (SOESD)
* School of Education at Southern Oregon University
* Bay Area Writing Project, U.C. Berkeley
* Mountain Park Nature Center, Ashland
* Poetry Out Loud!
* Chautauqua Poets and Writers

The OWP has strong relationships with curriculum leaders and administrators of Southern Oregon school districts, and the OWP director regularly attends regional Curriculum Council meetings at the Southern Oregon Education Service District ([SOESD](http://www.soesd.k12.or.us/)). Part of our vision for 2013-14 and beyond includes formalizing our collaboration with one or more of these districts. To that end, we are currently working on two grant proposals, both of which feature Instructional Summer Institutes (ISIs) and series of teacher-led follow-up workshops and seminars:

* *Title IIA Partnership grant, with Ashland School District for programs beginning in 2014*. This grant would build on the work of the district supporting teachers in implementing the Common Core State Standards in literacy across subject areas. It would also allow Ashland to ‘partner’ with neighboring districts, extending the reach of the grant to Phoenix-Talent and Medford, while Ashland would serve as the “lead” educational agency.
* *Oregon Education Investment Board “strategic investment” grant for programs beginning in 2014*.This grant, arising from Oregon HB3233, contains provisions for regional partnerships among service providers, universities, and school districts. It also contains provisions for supporting STEM initiatives. We are excited about proposing ISIs and ongoing workshops with a cross-content emphasis on the CCSS literacy standards in math, science and social studies. If included in a regional grant proposal from our Education Service District, these ISIs and subsequent teacher-led professional development would have the potential to impact teachers and schools across a broad geographic area.

The work of our site this year (described in part II below) was supported through a combination of a $5,000 SEED grant for re-affiliating Writing Project sites, a small balance of funds from workshop fees carried over from previous years, and 2012-13 workshop and youth writing camp fees. In addition, **t**he College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Education at SOU currently each provide one course release annually to the OWP director, for a total of two releases spread over four quarters. (Until 2012, both course releases came from the College of Arts and Sciences.) Several factors make this support from two separate schools on campus relevant. Joint support from the School of Education and the College of Arts and Sciences 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. Our partnership with the School of Education also introduces preservice teachers and undergraduate education majors to the NWP early in their careers.

Importantly, the active support of the School of Education has allowed the OWP to offer workshops and seminars for graduate credit at a reduced or ‘sponsored’ rate – a process of developing a syllabus which is then approved by the dean, and obtaining a course number so that students can register (whether they are SOU students or practicing teachers).

Despite two recent summers without an Invitational Summer Institute (ISI) in our region, local teachers who participated in a past ISI are still benefiting from its impact and enthusiastically sharing their experiences with others. As one teacher recently wrote, “The Writing Project brand is still vital in our region, thanks to the 19 summer institutes and year after year of follow-up professional development opportunities.” While we are proud of the work we have been able to do this year, we recognize the critical importance of re-establishing the ISIs for building and maintaining professional development that is grounded in local practice. Our cadre of teacher consultants (TCs) has been nurtured over the past two decades, but many are beginning to retire, and some have moved out of state. Bringing back the ISIs to southern Oregon is therefore at the top of our list of priorities for the coming years.

A related priority is securing sufficient funding to cover the two course releases that support the work of directing the site. In a very unstable financial climate at our university, SOU has recently undertaken ‘prioritization’ and ‘reorganization’ initiatives that have jeopardized all course releases that are not self-supported, or directly funded by revenue to the university. Increasingly, programs are cut that do not demonstrate a direct cost-benefit to the university (typically in the form of tuition revenue). In fact, part of the job of the site director has become to make the case to the administration of the centrality OWP’s work to the mission and commitments of the university. As we look toward 2013-14 and beyond, we seek ways of simultaneously funding the ISIs and the OWP director’s position, which we see as central to the mission and vision of the university and the K-12 community more broadly.

The Work of the Writing Project

While we have not been able to offer an ISI for the past two summers, we have continued to offer a range of low-cost professional development including workshops, a weeklong mini-institute, and summer youth writing camps. The $5,000 re-affiliation SEED grant mentioned above provided important support for all of these programs.

*Weeklong mini-institute:* [*The grammar-writing connection for teachers*](http://www.sou.edu/owp/documents/GrammarInfoReg.pdf).

Participants were preservice and practicing teachers of grades 6-12. This workshop, taught by the OWP director, emphasized the possibilities—not the perils—of embracing grammar instruction, and explored grammatical structures and punctuation as rhetorical choices rather than memorization of (and adherence to) rules. The workshop incorporated opportunities for teachers to write, to experience hands-on activities, and to develop and present their own ‘grammar-in-context’ lesson.

Practicing teachers participated in the institute for optional graduate credits as an ED507 class (these people enrolled as non-admitted students and paid full graduate tuition), or as a fee-based workshop with professional development units awarded through the Southern Oregon Education Service District. MAT students in English language arts who were completing their degrees were able to use this mini-institute as one of their required program electives; the combination of preservice and practicing teachers was energizing for everyone. Offering a choice of regular graduate tuition or workshop-fee created a win-win-win situation for SOU, OWP, and the participating teachers: the course generated revenue for the university, and teachers who didn’t need the graduate credits for continuing licensure were able to participate at lower cost, simultaneously generating workshop revenue that directly supported the work of the OWP.

In October 2013, we are hosting a follow-up morning session focused on supporting ELL students (“[The grammar-writing connection: Supporting ELL students](http://www.sou.edu/owp/documents/GrammarforELLworkshop2013.pdf)”); this follow-up session will be led by Dr. Greta Vollmer, director of the Bay Area Writing Project, and is open to all interested 6-college teachers whether or not they participated in the weeklong mini-institute in summer 2013.

*One-day* [*“Teaching argument-writing” workshop*](http://www.sou.edu/owp/teachingargument.html).

Forty-five teachers of grades 6 through community college (representing seven school districts) attended this one-day workshop on August 20, 2013, co-facilitated by the OWP director and three OWP teacher-consultants. This ‘back to school’ workshop focused on the theory and craft of teaching argument, a central component of the Common Core State Standards. The workshop was co-sponsored by the School of Education and the Oregon Council for the Social Studies (OCSS).

The workshop cost was intentionally low ($35 per teacher) to encourage participation and increase OWP recognition in our region. We were able to ‘break even’ by sharing the cost of food and TCs’ stipends with the School of Education. (Costs included stipends for three TCs, lunch for all participants, snacks, and a copy of the book *Teaching Students to Write Argument* [Smagorinsky et al] for each teacher.)

Teachers had the option of earning one graduate credit at a reduced rate, or earning PDUs through the Southern Oregon Education Service District. (To arrange this, we list the workshop on the SOESD website, and require teachers to create an ESD account if they don’t already have one. After each workshop, the SOESD generates PDU certificates for teachers, and keeps them in their account for them, a convenience to the OWP and teachers alike.)

Out of this workshop grew a [yearlong “teaching argument-writing” seminar](http://www.sou.edu/owp/documents/Argument_seminar_syllabus_general.pdf), which will be held during the academic year 2013-14. Facilitated by the OWP director, this seminar includes 8 meetings with time for teachers to workshop and debrief lessons related to the teaching of argumentation. The seminar is supported by a workshop fee; it may also be taken as ED500 for an optional graduate credit at a subsidized rate. Again, we see this as a win-win-win set-up: the university receives some tuition revenue, the OWP receives some workshop fees, and practicing teachers can participate at a reasonable cost, whether they want to earn graduate credit or not, collaborating and learning from each other across districts, subject areas and grade levels.

*Summer 2013: Three summer youth writing camps*

These camps were held in [Medford](http://www.sou.edu/owp/documents/WritingCampregform2013.pdf), [Ashland](http://www.sou.edu/owp/documents/NorthMtnParkCamp2013.pdf), and [Grants Pass](http://www.sou.edu/owp/documents/GPcampBrochure2013.pdf) respectively. These weeklong camps were each taught by an OWP TC, who also mentored a total of five preservice or new teachers serving as teaching assistants. These unpaid assistants had the opportunity to earn graduate credits as ED500, to earn professional development units (PDUs), or simply to volunteer as interns to gain experience teaching writing (e.g., to satisfy one of the criteria for admission to the MAT program).

Forty-five students in grades 4-9 participated in these camps, which emphasized the development of skill and pleasure in writing. Camp fees covered the TCs’ stipends and most of the materials. Two of the camps were held at the teachers’ school sites (no facilities cost). The third was held at a local nature center, which retained a portion of the camp fees.

In fall 2013, camp participants will come to the SOU campus for an authors’ reading and reception, where they will receive copies of a bound anthology containing each writer’s work. (OWP published the anthology using online publishing company Bookpatch.com; after receiving their free copy, students can purchase additional copies of the book online.)

*Classroom coaching, academic year 2012-13.*

In fall 2012, OWP provided support in writing instruction to a 4/5 teacher, through a demonstration writing unit culminating in the production of a class book of figurative language poetry. OWP provided copies of the book to the teacher and the school library, and made additional copies available to students.

In spring 2012 and spring 2013, OWP provided classroom coaching to a new K-1 teacher, through a writing unit culminating in the publication of elementary students’ books. With the help of a $250 mini-grant from OCTE and in-kind donations from an online publishing company, OWP co-hosted a young authors’ reception for family and community each year, and provided each student with a free copy of his or her book. This work was described and published in the spring 2013 edition of the [*Oregon English Journal*](http://www.octe.org/oregon-english-journal.html)(Perrow, M. My Word! Leveraging the power of product to enrich and extend the writing process*.* *Oregon English Journal,* *XXXV*(1), 11-15).

*Leveraging teacher expertise in creative ways: The case of the LPA workshops*

This project came about as a result of the site director’s conversation with the curriculum director of the Medford School District, as well as participation in a 2011 district workshop for teachers developing ‘local performance assessments’ (LPAs) aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in ELA. Many teachers’ response to their district’s mandated LPAs, which spanned all grade levels, was concern that they were not prepared to teach writing to meet the demands of the CCSS.

In spring 2013 the OWP invited six teachers from the Medford School District (a combination of TCs, non-TCs, and district classroom coaches) to participate in a discussion about designing professional development to help teachers implement meaningful, effective instruction aligned with the LPAs. In a follow-up discussion in summer 2013, these six teachers sketched out a professional development plan that includes an OWP summer mini-institute, followed by a series of workshops for teachers hosted by those participants. Unfortunately, the OWP did not have funding to pay these teachers for any further work (they each received a $50 gift certificate to Amazon.com). However, this teacher expertise is now being leveraged in a creative way.

A TC who was involved in the process has enrolled in an ED500 class for three graduate credits (at the subsidized rate), which she needs for her continued licensure. This is a “professional development” workshop, or independent study, with the site director as instructor of record. Her project initially involves identifying, collecting and developing creative approaches to teaching the Common Core standards assessed by the LPAs, beginning with the argument-writing LPA, across grade levels. Then, in consultation with the OWP site director, she will outline a curriculum (including a mini-institute and a series of teacher-led mini-workshops) to help teachers conduct meaningful writing instruction that is aligned with the LPAs.

As a final part of her project, the TC enrolled in ED500 will collaborate with a recently-retired TC, who will help her research funding sources (this required getting a university email address for the retired TC, so that she can access the database GrantForward.com.) Together, they will draft a formal grant proposal that might support this PD work, to be launched in summer 2014, and continued through the school year 2014-15. The grant application will include some salary for the retired TC, who will become the project manager. The draft proposal will be shared with the district curriculum director for feedback – and to inquire about the possibility of the district allocating some Title II-A funding support to this teacher-driven project – in winter 2014.

This project we see as potentially a five-way win: the first TC gains valuable professional experience and develops her leadership under the mentorship of a university faculty member; the second TC gains grant-writing experience and potentially a salary for managing the project; the OWP gains a teacher-driven professional development offering for 2014-15; SOU gains revenue from the student’s enrollment; the district stands to gain funding for powerful, teacher-driven professional development aligned with their teachers’ needs and the demands of the LPAs. Complicated, yes, but reflective of the interconnectedness that a Writing Project can foster by leveraging and linking resources in creative ways.

1. Concluding Thoughts

As I enter my third year as site director, I am beginning to appreciate the volume of work required in order to juggle fund-raising, program development, program implementation, and ongoing communication with our network of teachers. The amount of time I spend in my role as site director far exceeds the time ‘officially’ allocated by the two course releases I currently have. It has thus also been important to differentiate between the kind of work that is related to maintaining the vision and mission of the OWP, and the kind of work that is necessary for the functioning of the site, but does not necessarily require my involvement. That is, a substantial amount of my time goes to clerical, logistical, and organizational tasks.

I have begun to see the importance of finding creative ways to delegate and spread out some of those clerical and organizational tasks. For instance, I hope to find a way to hire a student worker in the near future. This would allow more time for me to seek and write grants – arguably one of our biggest priorities! It would also provide a meaningful internship opportunity for an English Education or MAT student.

Another possibility involves reaching out to retired teachers (TCs) who have expressed interest in helping with the OWP site work. I am collaborating now with two newly retired teachers. One is actively pursuing grant opportunities and supporting the work of the LPA project described above. The other has drafted a proposal for a “writing across the curriculum” project to support faculty on the SOU campus with writing instruction; she is currently seeking grant funding for this proposal, which the OWP would be delighted to sponsor.

Working with my university’s grants office and IT services, I have provided these TCs with university email accounts, so they can access the database at GrantForward.com. Although we do not have the resources to compensate them at this point, we are hoping that they will help with future grant-writing, and that her compensation for some of the clerical and organizational tasks can be supported by future grant funding.

A key resource for the OWP, regionally, has been our [Southern Oregon Education Service District](http://www.soesd.k12.or.us/) (SOESD). This district, comprising multiple counties and school districts in our broad geographic region, hosts a monthly meeting of superintendents and curriculum directors. Participating in those monthly meetings (representing Southern Oregon University and the Oregon Writing Project) has been tremendously useful. By gaining a deeper appreciation for the needs and challenges facing our schools and districts, the OWP has become well positioned to participate in a series of upcoming regional grant proposals submitted to the state through the Oregon Education Investment Board. Establishing personal relationships with curriculum directors, principals, and superintendents over time has meant that when “partnership” grants became available this fall 2013, we already had the relationships in place to discuss possibilities.

The SOESD has also been helpful with the logistics of professional development regionally: the OWP can list offerings on their professional development workshop database, making them available to teachers throughout the region. The SOESD generates “professional development unit” certificates for teachers who take workshops we have listed on their site, and keeps the records on file for those teachers. The SOESD also provides me with annually updated data bases including the contact information for all school and district administrators in the southern Oregon region.

Having access to the National Writing Project web site for locating the longitudinal research to cite in grant proposals has been very useful, as have some of the documents provided on the site, such as a press release form. The NWP staff are a wonderful resource. Miriam Neidhardt has been available and patient as I learn the intricacies of site profile reporting. Barbara has been thorough and clear in explaining the exigencies of grants (both budgeting and reporting). These sorts of practical supports are invaluable to someone without a ‘business-minded’ background.

Finally, other connections and resources on our campus include our Enrollment Services (registration) office. I am continuing to work to understand how best to offer OWP workshops at a subsidized tuition rate (known as a ‘contract’ rate at SOU). Flexibility of enrollment options to meet the continuing professional development needs of teachers throughout their careers, especially when the state licensing board requires them to earn additional graduate credits for renewal of their license.

I have had several opportunities to collaborate with other sites over the past year. In spring 2013 I visited the Bay Area Writing Project, where I collaborated with BAWP director Greta Vollmer in developing the workshop that became “The grammar-writing connection for teachers.” (While in the Bay Area, I also had the opportunity to visit the Area 3 Writing Project and learn about their effective model for making a site self-sustaining.) This fall 2013 Dr. Greta Vollmer will come to southern Oregon to present a brief follow-up workshop on the grammar-writing connection for teachers, focused specifically on working with ELL students.

The recent hiring of a Grants and Contracts director at SOU has been a boon. Savvy and experienced, she is an enthusiastic supporter of the OWP, and has been helping me interpret RFPs. She was instrumental in bringing the database GrantForward.com to our campus. Making a connection with her early in her tenure here has been very useful and encouraging.

One significant thing that the grants director recommended I do this year was to write a “case statement” for the Oregon Writing Project, to provide to our university administration when submitting the “intent to apply” form grant funding. (This is also in hopes of forestalling the denial of future course release time for the site director.) She has also recommended using this statement as the basis for a presentation to our Foundation office, so that they can position the OWP as a good prospect for potential donors. Laboring (lovingly) over the writing of this statement, I’ve wondered if other directors have similar documents that we might share with each other. I would certainly be happy to share the OWP case statement (currently under revision) if it would help others draft similar documents.

The area I wrestle with most in this case statement is in demonstrating a clear “cost benefit” to the university for the OWP. I intend this year to work with an upper-division student majoring in business, to develop a cost-benefit analysis of the sort the administration has in mind. This partnership would provide an upper-division student with the opportunity to conduct a real-world analysis with real-world stakes, and it would provide me with a perspective that I am currently lacking. I hope that it would also inform the case statement in positive ways.

Despite the undeniable qualitative evidence that the OWP extends the stated mission and commitments of the university throughout our region’s communities, the administration nonetheless retains a narrow definition of “cost benefit,” which is reduced to tuition revenue produced as a direct result of OWP activities. This is why the course releases historically allocated to OWP work are threatened. Yet this release time is vital to my ability as site director to maintain connections in our schools and communities, look for opportunities to enact the vision of the OWP, continue to connect teachers with SOU in ways that are personally and professionally meaningful to them – all of which arguably are highly valuable in advancing the vision and mission of the university.