**OR Oregon Writing Project at SOU**

**2014 NWP Site Report**

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1. 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. 2013-14 was our second year of re-affiliation with the National Writing Project. The work of our site this year focused on the top three priorities we identified during long-term strategic planning in 2012-13:

1. **Pilot small-scale classes and workshops to meet the current needs of teachers (both preservice and inservice), and increase site visibility in the region.**
2. **Bring back intensive summer institutes (ISIs) to the southern Oregon region**. As our current cadre of TCs, nurtured over the past 20 years, is increasingly retiring or moving away, we recognize the critical importance of the ISIs for building and sustaining professional development grounded in local teachers’ practice.
3. **Secure sufficient funding and/or university support to cover the two (quarter) course releases that support the work of directing the site.**

We achieved all three of these objectives this year. Part II below provides information about classes, workshops, and our 2014 summer institute. Although implemented on a relatively small scale, workshops and institute alike were well attended and successful (see below).

However, securing funding and university support for the director’s course release time continues to be a challenge, in a very uncertain period at our university and statewide. SOU recently undertook ‘prioritization’ and ‘reorganization’ initiatives in 2012-13 that jeopardized all course releases not directly funded by revenue to the university. A subsequent faculty vote of “no confidence” in the university administration in spring 2014 was followed by the resignation of the president and provost, with the state appointing an interim administration that took up the reins this summer. Our university is now officially in ‘retrenchment’, with more budget cuts and reductions looming. Further complicating things, as we move into 2014-15, the Oregon State University system is also reorganizing, with each small regional university forming its own new governing board.

Amidst all of this upheaval and uncertainty, the role and mission of Southern Oregon University continues to be debated. An interesting tension emerged recently, between focusing on becoming a ‘destination liberal arts university’, and providing a high-quality, relevant and meaningful college education to meet the needs of our region’s students and families. It’s too early to tell for sure, but it appears that our new Interim President has a clear vision of community connectedness and engagement with our K-12 colleagues that will lead to a thriving regional university. We hope so, because this is a vision that the OWP strongly supports.

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 enacts SOU’s stated 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 Division of Humanities & Culture and the School of Education currently each provide one (quarter) course release annually to the OWP director, for a total of two releases spread over four quarters. 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 preservice teacher education.

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 ‘contract’ rate – a process of developing a syllabus which is then approved by the dean, and obtaining a course number so that students can register for graduate credit (whether they are SOU students or practicing teachers).

1. The Work of the Writing Project

The OWP at SOU sponsored a variety of workshops, seminars, camps, and other activities in 2013-14. Fees charged for these events (as well as scholarships and donations) make them largely self-sustaining, and also provide sufficient revenue to cover the travel costs for the site director to attend the annual NWP director’s meeting, annual site fees, and miscellaneous site expenses. (We don’t ‘make’ money, but we tend to just break even.)

The following list shows the range of projects undertaken in 2013-14. Several of these will then be explained in more detail, below.

[**“Teaching argument” seminar 2013-14**](http://www.sou.edu/assets/owp/docs/ED500_argument_seminar_syllabus_2013.docx). Offered as a workshop, or for graduate credit, for teachers grades 6-community college, across content areas. One full-day workshop and eight additional ‘continuity meetings’ during the academic year. Fee/reduced-rate credits. For more information, see below.

**“Teaching argument” professional development workshop for Advanced Southern Credit (ASC) teachers of English language arts.** Winter 2014. Held at SOU campus, for teachers of high school classes that award SOU credits. Fee.

[**Digital Storytelling Project, Ruch School**](http://www.sou.edu/assets/owp/Report_to_Ruch_PTO_2014_optimized.pdf)**.** Spring 2014.Six-week project in the 7th grade class at Ruch K-8 Community School. Lead teacher Abram Katz, local digital storyteller and audio engineer, also mentored four SOU undergraduates (education majors) who worked as classroom assistants and co-teachers. Funded by the PTO.

**Coaching: Book-publication for first graders.** Spring 2014. Six-week project at Ruch K-8 Community School, coaching the first grade teacher and supporting instruction in the writing process. Culminated in students receiving free copies of their books, and reading at an authors’ reception at the Jackson County Ruch Branch Library, to kick off Summer Reading Programs. Funded by PTO. [View a brief video of students talking about the writing and publishing process](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abd--IVfy0I).

[**“Grammar-Writing Connection for Teachers.”**](assets/owp/docs/GrammarforTeachersFlyer2014.pdf)Summer 2014 weeklong intensive workshop for teachers grades 6-college. Offered as a workshop for professional development units, or as ED507 for graduate credit. Teachers from Jackson County, Josephine County, RCC, and preservice teachers from SOU’s MAT program participated. Fee/reduced-rate credits. For more information see below.

[**Literacy Leadership Institute**](assets/owp/docs/2014_Institute_flyer.pdf)**.** Summer 2014. Three-week intensive institute devoted to developing teachers’ writing, teaching, and leadership skills. K-college teachers applied as Summer Fellows, supported by a federal SEED (Supporting Effective Educator Development) grant. For more information, see below.

[**Young Authors Cam**](http://www.sou.edu/owp/writingcamps.html)**ps.** Summer 2014. Three one-week camps (in Medford and Grants Pass) for students ages 9-18. OWP teacher consultants mentored pre-service teachers who assisted at the camps. Partnership with SOESD Migrant Education and each school district to provide scholarships to eligible students. Fee.

**Title IIA University-School Partnership Grant.** Collaboration with the Ashland and Phoenix-Talent School Districts on these federal grant proposals. While neither was awarded, the proposals were thoughtful, substantial and reflective of our strong collaborative relationship with these districts. The Ashland collaboration focused on CCSS W.1 (argument writing) and would have involved district teachers and SOU faculty in a yearlong collaboration in the teaching of argument-writing in the disciplines.

Of the above list of 2013-14 projects, several seem worth expanding upon, as promising and sustainable ways to meet the needs of multiple constituents simultaneously (e.g., practicing teachers, preservice teachers, the university).

[**“Grammar-writing connection for teachers” (Summer 2014)**](assets/owp/docs/GrammarforTeachersFlyer2014.pdf)Participants were preservice and practicing teachers grades 6-college. 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 (they 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 completing their degrees at SOU were able to pay regular graduate tuition and use this mini-institute as one of their required program electives.

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.

The combination of preservice and practicing teachers was energizing for everyone. “I love being around all this new energy!” was a common comment from experienced teachers, while preservice teachers said, “It’s so inspiring to be in a class with experienced teachers!”

(Note: In October 2013, we hosted a follow-up session to the previous summer’s “grammar for teachers” workshop, focused specifically on supporting ELL students’ writing development; this successful follow-up session was facilitated by Dr. Greta Vollmer, director of the Bay Area Writing Project, and open to all interested 6-college teachers whether or not they had participated in the weeklong summer mini-institute. Unfortunately, we will not be able to offer this follow-up module in 2014.)

This model is proving effective because it simultaneously meets the needs of preservice and inservice teachers, and creates opportunities for them to work together collaboratively on effective writing instruction in an intensive workshop environment where they learn teaching techniques in the context of experiencing the writing process. “It really revolutionized how I teach grammar in the context of sentence composing,” wrote one high school teacher in a typical comment after the workshop.

**Argument-writing workshop/continuity seminar**

In August 2013 (part of last year’s site report, but the impetus for a 2013-14 seminar), 45 teachers grades 6 through community college attended a one-day workshop, 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 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.)

Out of this workshop grew a [yearlong “teaching argument-writing” seminar](http://www.sou.edu/owp/documents/Argument_seminar_syllabus_general.pdf), held during the academic year 2013-14. Facilitated by the OWP director, this seminar included 8 meetings with time for teachers to workshop and debrief lessons related to the teaching of argument-writing. The seminar was supported by a workshop fee ($100 per teacher); teachers could also opt to take it as ED500 for one graduate credit at a reduced rate. Again, we see this as a win-win-win set-up: the university increases enrollment and 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.

“Teaching Argument-writing in Grades 6-12 has both enriched and focused the teaching and learning in my classroom,” wrote one participant. Another noted, “As a result of this class, I have been able to teach argument-writing with clarity.” The areas where participating teachers said the class most helped them included:

* Differentiate between basic types of argument, including simple arguments of fact, judgment and policy;
* Explain the role of warrants, backing, definitions, and counter-arguments in order to teach more complex arguments of judgment or policy;
* Develop activities (‘structured processes’) that support students’ argument writing;
* Frame a ‘researchable problem’ of interest to your students;
* Evaluate arguments, and be able to teach students’ to evaluate others’ arguments.

There is a clear need for ongoing support with teaching argument writing, especially given its prominence in the Common Core. This year, we are working with the School of Education to find a way to award graduate credit in teaching methods to MAT students who participate in the 2014-15 teaching-argument seminar, while retaining the reduced-fee credit option for practicing teachers.

[**Literacy Leadership Institute (summer 2014)**](assets/owp/docs/2014_Institute_flyer.pdf)[**SLIDE SHOW!**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5LWRsdNE9C8)

Thanks to the support of a two-year federal $20,000 SEED (Supporting Effective Educators) grant through the National Writing Project, we were excited to be able to offer an intensive summer institute this year. ([View our slideshow from the institute!)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5LWRsdNE9C8) Administrators and TCs were asked to nominate teachers to participate in the OWP’s Literacy Leadership Institute; teachers could also nominate themselves. Interested teachers completed a brief online application (we used Google forms). Twelve teachers were selected to participate, and invited to a pre-institute orientation meeting. At this meeting, teachers brainstormed possible demonstration lessons, and received some preliminary coaching about what would make a good demonstration lesson. We also reviewed the institute requirements, including post-institute participation in some aspect of site leadership. This might take the form of a workshop or demonstration lesson as part of our Saturday Seminar series in 2014-15, or some other form of site leadership. Ultimately, ten teachers signed commitment letters and showed up on Monday, July 28.

So there were twelve of us in all: ten teachers (grades 1 – college), and two TC facilitators (the OWP site director, and a veteran 6th grade teacher who has co-facilitated many summer institutes over the years. (Interestingly, the OWP site director participated in a Bay Area invitational summer institute in 1994; twenty years later, this was her first opportunity to facilitate an institute.) The institute was collaboratively planned, and drew heavily on the 6th grade teacher’s past experiences as co-facilitator, while also taking into account the demands of the Common Core Standards.

We framed each week of the institute in one of the ‘rhetorical modes’ of the Common Core (argument, informative, narrative), exploring multiple real-world genres of writing that draw on each of those modes. Each participant compiled a portfolio including a piece in each rhetorical mode, and a reflective essay. Everyone submitted one piece to the [group anthology, *Writing is Messy*](http://www.thebookpatch.com/BookStoreResults?search=Oregon%20writing%20project&ddl=any), now available for $6 at TheBookpatch.com. Each day, one person contributed to the [institute blog](http://owp2014lli.blogspot.com/) in a genre of his/her choice, and read this blog entry to us the next day.

Because of limited budget, we made several compromises in designing this institute. First, we planned a three-week institute rather than the four weeks we had initially hoped for. We scheduled two four-day weeks, and a third five-day week. We consequently limited the number of participants, to allow sufficient time for demonstration lessons in the final week. We provided stipends to teachers ($350) that were lower than we would have liked, but that nonetheless covered the cost of the optional three graduate credits. And we dug into our core budget to cover costs that the SEED grant couldn’t cover, in anticipation of workshop fees from our Saturday Seminar Series recouping those costs.

Despite what we felt were compromises, we endeavored to remain true to the principles and practices of the Writing Project professional development. We were pleasantly surprised that the cohort, by and large, saw themselves as writers gone ‘dormant’ and were eager to re-connect with themselves as writers. They welcomed writing time, and writing response groups. We read *The Essential Don Murray* and felt his relevance as if it were 1987. Elementary and middle/high groups read and reviewed research on best practices in the teaching of writing. Six returning TCs gave demonstration lessons, which were highlights for many participants. Ultimately, comments from participants completing the institute attest to its success:

*As a result of this workshop, I am excited to step back to my planning book and work in more writing, writing, writing!* (NM)

*I’ve found the content of this institute so inspiring for my practice as a teacher. I’m armed with inspiration from the practical (prepare for writer’s workshop) to the exploratory (how does gender affect our reading and writing?)… If I’m going to grow as a writer —and I want to— then I’m going to need more opportunities like this workshop. The greatest new awareness I have is that I want to explore the more creative and free-flowing aspects of my own writing.* (CM)

*I’m bringing a renewed passion for language and playing with it. I see the importance of writers being part of a supportive community… The resources provided and the cohort of this group were both exactly what I needed. I’m energized and affirmed.* (JC)

*The Oregon Writing Project has helped me find my voice as a writer. It has helped me let go of my anxiety and fear I would feel when I looked at a blank page. I was afraid of the empty space and afraid what I filled it with would not be good enough. It is this same fear and anxiety I want to help my students leave behind by showing them how to find their voices.* (JB)

*The experience of being able to write creatively in a variety of genres and align with common core standards was enlightening and satisfying.* (HH)

*This workshop was life-changing in how I see myself as a writing teacher. … Because I am passionate about writing, I have always been passionate about teaching it. It is not enough anymore to just be passionate about teaching it; I must be passionate about advocating for it as well.* (KN)

*Prior to this workshop I did not think of myself as a writer. I was a teacher who assigned prompts and focused on correcting students’ mechanical errors rather than focus on content… it had been years since I had actually written anything other than emails and grocery lists. ..How telling it is to actually do the writing tasks ourselves that we ask of our students. . . .*(SL)

*This institute has reminded me of what I’ve always known: I am a writer…In the past, I haven’t allowed students to enjoy writing, because I’ve made it all about perfect punctuation and formulas… I am excited to be returning to the classroom and share my newfound passion and view of writing with my students. I plan on sharing my writing with my students this year because how can I expect my students to expose their words and try new things if I’m not leading by example?*(AW)

Comments like these demonstrate that teachers in our region are as eager as ever to engage with colleagues around meaningful, engaging writing instruction. The Writing Project’s approach to writing, teaching, and leading stays relevant despite the vagaries of policy, mandates, and funding at various levels.

**Site leadership processes**

The Literacy Leadership Institute provided an opportunity for the site director (Margaret Perrow) to share site leadership with experienced TC Andra Hollenbeck, one of the site’s co-directors. Andra Hollenbeck routinely supports the site director with strategic planning, and serves as a sounding board in many decision-making processes. There are two other co-directors at the site. One is an SOU faculty member and TC originally from Washington state, Dr. Anne Beaufort, who serves as co-director for higher-education professional development. (We are working with faculty professional development staff on a plan for providing SOU faculty with support for writing instruction.) The former site director, Dr. Charlotte Hadella, serves as *de facto* co-director, drawing on her many years as former site director to provide advice and feedback about program planning and implementation.

One of the explicit objectives of the 2014 institute was to extend site leadership by building teacher leadership capacity. In 2014-15, we plan to host a Saturday Seminar Series in which at least half of the summer 2014 participants will present a workshop or demonstration lesson for regional colleagues. In addition to this Saturday Series, new TCs are undertaking leadership in other ways:

* Two new TCs are from a K-8 school that has received a $20,000 NWP High-Needs School grant for 2014-15. These two teachers (grades 1 and 7) will take leadership in facilitating the professional development this grant provides. All nine teachers in the school are participating in a yearlong professional development project focused on teaching opinion/argument writing across grade levels and content areas. In addition to ten workshop meetings focused on writing and teaching argument, they will collaboratively assess a whole-school writing prompt across grade levels, observe each others’ classes and participate in a two-day consolidation/planning retreat in summer 2015. The two TCs are excited about the opportunity to exercise literacy leadership in their own teaching context this year.
* One new TC will provide social media support for the Oregon Writing Project this year. This might include re-designing and maintaining our website, creating a Facebook page, and maintaining our email lists. A small amount of our core budget will be allocated to this.
* One new TC took her interest in working with teachers to the Medford district curriculum director, and has just been hired as the new School Improvement Specialist for nine elementary schools. She is very excited to find ways to get more teachers access to OWP institutes. Her leadership could prove critical to the OWP’s presence in that district, the largest in the southern Oregon region.
* One new TC, who felt very uncertain about her leadership skills at the outset, has been developing a writer’s workshop curriculum for elementary teachers (“Getting off to the Write Start”) in her district; she’s in the process of sharing it with the district curriculum director, and with her leadership, we hope to propose a contract to the district.
* One new TC is interested in extending our summer young authors’ camps by coordinating a camp with the regional office of Migrant Education, for migrant students (most of whom are native Spanish speakers).

We look forward to regular meetings of our expanded site leadership team, consisting of the following:

* Margaret Perrow, site director
* Andra Hollenbeck, co-director and inservice coordinator for middle/high school
* Anne Beaufort, higher education PD coordinator
* Charlotte Hadella, site director *emeritus* and site advisor
* Nancy Martin, teachers-as-writers coordinator
* Amy Woods, social media and communications coordinator
* Amy Schacht, summer youth camp coordinator
* Carrie McCoy, in-service coordinator for elementary schools

In short, the 2014 Literacy Leadership Institute has gone a long way toward infusing new teacher leadership into the Oregon Writing Project at SOU, and we are excited about our expanded site leadership for the upcoming year.

1. Concluding Thoughts

The two grants that we have recently received through the National Writing Project ($20,000 2-year SEED grant for summer institutes in 2014 and 2015, and $20,000 high-needs school grant for 2014-15) have been critical to our ability to maintain visibility and offer high-quality professional development in our region. These grants have both been critical, too, to our ability to nurture teacher leadership. In fact, the *intersection* of these two grants has proven especially powerful: two new TCs from our Literacy Leadership Institute enthusiastically took up the role of planning and implementing the professional development for the high-needs school grant, after participating in the institute this summer.

In a time of retrenchment and reorganization at our university, the survival of the Writing Project at SOU will clearly depend on our ability to secure outside funding so that we can continue to leverage the expertise and connections of a university faculty director, and in turn foster and support local teacher leadership. 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 ‘squeezed’ funding for state education, all course releases become budgetary targets.

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. I am pleased that so far, our new president seems to understand the value of the OWP, with its far-reaching connections into the community, its shared commitment to education, and track record of supporting teacher leadership.

For more information, visit [www.sou.edu/owp](http://www.sou.edu/owp) or email [owp@sou.edu](mailto:owp@sou.edu).