CHAPTER 13

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR OWI

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This chapter examines how institutions and instructors can prepare students for OWCs. Integrating the latest research across fields with the work of the CCCC OWI Committee, this chapter provides effective practices and strategies for adequately preparing students for technology-based courses and for learning to write in such settings.

Keywords: community building, online orientation, online readiness, online teaching strategies, student preparation, student support

Students, particularly nontraditional ones, increasingly seek online educational opportunities as they juggle the constraints and demands of families, part- or full-time jobs, and other social and financial responsibilities (Noel-Levitz, 2013; see also Chapters 9 & 10). With college enrollments declining overall (US Census Bureau, 2013), colleges and universities are seeking additional enrollment in online courses as a part of their long-term strategies (Allen & Seaman, 2013, p. 4) while state governments increasingly seek evidence not just of enrollment, but also of retention and graduation when funding colleges and universities (Harnish, 2011). Retention rates in online classes were noted as an "important or very important barrier to the growth of online education" by 73.5% of chief academic officers in the most recent Babson survey of higher education administrators (Allen & Seaman, 2013, p. 30).

Students continue to seek online educational opportunities because of flexibility in scheduling, the perception of online courses as "time-saving," and the ability to attend to family responsibilities while taking courses (Harris & Martin, 2012; Leh, 2002; Shea, Swan, Fredricksen & Pickett, 2002; Young, 2006). However, once students select online education, they must then be assisted by educational institutions to become successful in online courses, particularly in OWCs, where students must engage much more fully with both reading and

producing written texts and navigating the technologies to do so. While students taking online courses in content-heavy subjects might watch lectures, read a textbook, and take multiple-choice or other objective exams, students in OWCs more frequently might be asked to engage in collaborative activities (i.e., discussion boards, small group projects), complete writing tasks (i.e., written essays), and interact with students and faculty (i.e., peer-writing groups, synchronous conferences with faculty). Any of these activities require successfully navigating a variety of LMS components as well as uploading digital files, accessing and evaluating written feedback, and participating in course activities that require them to engage and interact with peers and with the instructor (see OWI Principles 3, 4, 11, & 13).

Literature reviews across a number of fields (Future of State Universities 2011; Lack, 2013; Warnock, 2013) have illustrated the wide variety of research about how learning outcomes in online courses compare to onsite or face-to-face courses. While writing studies has been developing its understanding of instructor-related issues regarding online teaching (Hewett, 2010, 2015b; Hewett & Ehmann, 2004; McGrath, 2008; Meloncon, 2007), time it takes to teach online (Worley & Tesdell, 2009), and general issues related to online learners (Cargile-Cook & Grant-Davie, 2005, 2103; special issues of *Computers and Composition* 2001, 18.4 and 2006, 23.1; *Technical Communication Quarterly,* 1999, 8.1 and 2007, 16.1), research in OWI has not adequately addressed the issue of student preparation and student success for OWCs.

In March, 2013, the CCCC OWI Committee published *A Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for OWI*, which provided 15 OWI principles. Three of the OWI principles related directly to students and student preparation:

- **OWI Principle 10: Students should be prepared by the institution and their teachers for the unique technological and pedagogical components of OWI** (pp. 21-23).
- **OWI Principle 11: Online writing teachers and their institutions should develop personalized and interpersonal online communities to foster student success** (pp. 23-24).
- **OWI Principle 13: OWI students should be provided support components through online/digital media as a primary resource; they should have access to face-to-face support components as a secondary set of resources** (pp. 26-28).

These three principles dealing most directly with student preparation are included within the institutional principles category. One of the reasons for their inclusion in this category rather than in a category specific to students is that

remarkably little research has been conducted with students on their preparation for online courses (see Chapter 17). Thus, this chapter highlights what we know about student preparation for online courses in general and for OWI in particular, and it offers recommendations and effective practices addressing student preparation for OWI. This information is drawn from the research work of the committee, the CCCC OWI Committee Expert/Stakeholder Panel, and consistent themes in published research, much of which is described in the Introduction and Chapter 1.

The Necessity of Student Preparation for OWI

Ivan L. Harrell's (2008) multi-disciplinary review of the existing literature on student preparation offered suggestions to increase success involving student readiness, student orientation, and student support. His study foreshadowed many of the principles and effective practices of the OWI policy statement, which demonstrates that the OWI principles are not radical or unknown to educators working with onsite and online students. However, in writing studies in general and in rhetoric and composition in particular, little-to-no work has been done specifically on how students select online classes, how to prepare students for OWCs, and what characteristics of online learners help them succeed in online classes. To help them understand the current state of affairs in OWI, the CCCC OWI Committee administered two nationwide surveys—one for fully online courses and the other for hybrid ones (CCCC OWI Committee, 2011a & 2011b, respectively) that resulted in *The State of the Art of OWI* report (2011c). This survey was, in part, an attempt to learn about student preparation and preferences from the instructor's point of view. One issue that emerged from the CCCC OWI Committee surveys is the need to understand more about students' apparent readiness for online education.

Over the past decade and more, research in online education across the disciplines, particularly in education and psychology, has considered student readiness for online learning. In particular, this research has focused on the use of student surveys and other diagnostic instruments (McVay, 2000, 2001; Parnell & Carraher, 2003; Smith, 2005; Smith, Murphy, & Mahoney, 2003; Watkins, Leigh, & Triner, 2004) and identifying the characteristics of students who are successful online learners (Dabbagh, 2007; Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006). In relation to identifying online student characteristics, Nada Dabbagh (2007) predicted that "the profile of the online learner population is changing from one that is older, mostly employed, place bound, goal oriented, and intrinsically motivated, to one that is diverse, dynamic, tentative, younger, and responsive to rapid technological changes" (p. 224); these traits indicate that online education

appeals not only to so-called nontraditional learners but increasingly to younger learners as well. Current consensus in online education is that successful student learners are self-motivated, goal-oriented, and efficient at time management. However, OWI teachers are likely to find the full range of students in their classrooms; mingling in classes with the dynamic, tentative, and younger students are students who are returning to school with full-time jobs, reconsidering their first careers for second (or even third) careers, and/or juggling family responsibilities with school. Some have poor technology skills, others have excellent skills with social media but no skills with educational technology, and others easily use technology in any setting (Hewett, 2015a). Additionally, students have a wide range of access needs—often masked by the online setting—that include physical disabilities, learning challenges, multilingual language learning traits, and socioeconomic disadvantages as described in Chapters 1, 8, 9, & 10 & OWI Principle 1 (pp. 7-11). It is challenging for writing studies educators to ensure that support is in place for this range of students with varying access needs and technological, writing, and life skills to complete OWCs successfully.

Recent research, such as that by Moon-Heum Cho (2012), has shown that online orientations to the LMS or the course are useful for students and their success in online courses. However, in the CCCC OWI Committee's surveys, only 19% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "students have completed an instrument, which [sic] has indicated that their learning preferences are conducive to success in an online environment" (CCCC OWI Committee, 2011c, p. 82). Thus, even if the research indicated that online orientations are highly reliable and valid (Dray, Lowenthal, Miszkiewicz, Ruiz-Primo, & Marczynski, 2011), the majority of students are more than likely enrolling in online courses regardless of their readiness for online learning. As institutions seek to boost online enrollments, they are unlikely to require students to participate in mandatory institutional readiness assessments prior to enrollment and to exclude students from enrolling for online courses. Even those students who do take recommended readiness exams may believe that they will be successful in online courses despite the results of these surveys.

Once students enroll in online courses, whether or not they are offered formal preparation for online learning, they face a number of challenges. One of the CCCC OWI Committee's (2011a, 2011b) survey questions asked, "What do students report are the most problematic aspects of the [writing] courses?" Compiled results from the two surveys showed participants indicating that once students enroll in online classes, regardless of their preparation, the most common challenges they face are "keeping up with the class" (75%), "technical problems with the student interface" (58%), "lack of motivation" (50%), and "getting started in the course" (39%) (CCCC OWI Committee, 2011c, p. 84).

Instructors indicated that they most frequently dealt with student issues through "community building activities early in the semester" (66%), "informal portions of discussion board" (60%), "communicating a reasonable amount of flexibility for the larger, more sophisticated projects (acknowledging that things do/can go wrong)" (54%), and "work[ing] closely with the IT department to correct technical problems quickly" (52%) (CCCC OWI Committee, 2011c, p. 84). Overall, the survey results indicated that student issues early in the term might be linked, at least in part, to unfamiliarity with the course requirements and lack of understanding of the online interface or problems with the online interface itself. Faculty responses to problematic aspects of online courses frequently were communication-based: setting up opportunities for questions in the LMS and communicating with students and with IT staff in a timely manner.

How students perceive online courses is a second aspect of student readiness for OWI that is slightly less tangible than gauging student readiness via a survey or instrument. Noel-Levitz's (2013) surveys regarding student readiness for online instruction indicated that the top five challenges students face in online courses relate to their perceptions of student/faculty interaction and the quality of the course. Respondents were asked to rate the following statements:

- The quality of instruction is excellent.
- Student assignments are clearly defined in the syllabus.
- Faculty are responsive to student needs.
- Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.
- Faculty provide timely feedback about student progress. (Noel-Levitz, 2013, p. 9)

These factors are related to student perception because, whether or not the elements listed above are true objectively (i.e., a faculty member might indeed be responsive but the students do not consider her to be responsive because they do not share the same definition for "responsive" in this context), students in the survey perceived these five factors to be challenges to success in online classes. At least three of the above-stated factors (i.e., clearly defined assignments, faculty responsiveness to student needs, and timely feedback about student progress) relate directly to potentially effective practices in OWI (OWI Principles 3 and 4, pp. 12-15; also see Chapters 3, 4, 5, & 11). A better understanding of students' motivation and their reasons for choosing online classes as well as their perceptions of whether and how online courses meet their interpersonal and intellectual needs can provide institutions and instructors much needed information in developing OWI that will help students succeed. Instructor perceptions and anecdotal data, when combined and triangulated with other data sources such as retention rates (see Chapter 6) and student per-

ception and experience studies (see Chapter 17), can offer important insights into what institutions and faculty can do to better prepare students and help them succeed in OWCs.

The lessons from the CCCC OWI Committee surveys of fully online and hybrid OWI educators and from other research into student preparation and success are three fold: (1) student readiness for online courses cannot always be directly measured, (2) student perception of the online course plays a role in their success in online courses, and (3) what instructors believe students need to be successful in an online course has little to do with being successful in an online *writing* course. According to the "State-of-the-Art Report" (CCCC OWI Committee, 2011c):

> The differences between online courses, online writing courses, between online training and online writing instruction training, and online teaching and online writing teaching blur throughout this report, indicating that traditional ideas and strategies simply have migrated to online setting without sufficient consideration of what specific media mean for learning in a particular disciplinary area like writing. (p. 10)

In the remainder of this chapter, we recommend strategies at the institutional and instructor levels that keep in mind the challenges associated with OWI and highlight the unique qualities of OWI that make student support challenging.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDENT PREPARATION

The OWI principles and accompanying example effective practices provided a variety of recommendations for institutions and instructors regarding OWI in general. In this section, we focus on the factors that relate to student preparation and success first at the institutional level and then the instructor level.

Institutional Level

Orientation Modules/Models

While an onsite, face-to-face writing class might rely on little more than the technology of books, chalkboards, pens, and papers—and possibly a computer-powered projector—the online class usually relies on a functioning LMS, an accessible IT professional or student help desk, a working computer, and reliable access to the Internet (see Chapter 10). In addition to these external factors, students need technological capabilities and preparation before beginning an online class.

Individual institutions offer a wide range of technology training, support, development, and mentoring for students (and instructors). Some institutions or their writing programs make a concerted effort to standardize their online courses so that students can have similar experiences across courses. Other institutions provide minimal technology training, support, development and mentoring, relying on faculty and students to be motivated to troubleshoot their own problems. OWI Principle 7 called for both technology and pedagogical preparation for taking an OWC, making such minimal support unacceptable for preparing students or teachers for success in OWI (p. 17).

In conjunction with instructors within the disciplines, general orientation opportunities should be provided to students enrolling in online classes. These orientations need to include three specific areas:

1. An overview of required technologies and technological skills necessary to complete the course, including an introduction to the LMS;
2. Self-awareness assessments to help students gauge their own efficacy for completing the course; and
3. Disciplinary-specific information on what particular elements the course will include (i.e., small group work, synchronous meeting sessions, and the like).

Technology-related orientations should be twofold. First, they should include general information regarding the hardware, software, and applications that will be required in the class. For example, students need to know whether a netbook computer, tablet, or mobile device like a smart phone is suitable for the types and kinds of activities they will perform (see Chapter 16) or whether they need to access more powerful or otherwise different technology. Students also need to know whether they can access the LMS through the Internet alone or whether they also need access to such software as Adobe Acrobat or plug-ins as an updated version of Java to access course content. These technological needs are issues of access addressed in OWI Principle 1 (pp. 7-11) and discussed in Chapters 8 and 10. Second, students need an in-depth overview of the LMS that will be used in the course with respect to how it will be used in an OWC particularly. Moreover, students with disabilities require additional instruction on how they will interface their assistive technology—screen readers, Braille Displays, voice input software, and the like—with the institutional LMS, library, and other student services websites. OWI Principle 10 encouraged institutions and instructors to provide OWI preparation that includes familiarization with the interface and provides explicit instruction on where to find assignments, post and retrieve writing, and participate in interactive components of the class (i.e., discussion board, group work, and the like) (pp. 21-23). OWI Effective Practice

10.7 advocated for the OWC use of the institutionally approved software or LMS (pp. 22-23). One rationale for this effective practice is that instructors and students will need to have an outside resource for help with technological support that may arise, taking the onus for technology training and problem-solving assistance off the OWI teachers' shoulders. Another rationale, discussed in Chapter 1, is the notion that for some issues of student access, using a common LMS and foregoing outside software and programs levels the playing field and avoids requiring OWI teachers to teach technology over writing itself (see also OWI Principle 2, p. 7, and Chapters 4, 8, & 14 regarding this somewhat sticky issue).

Joel English (2014) highlighted four fundamentals for students to succeed as online learners: motivation, self-discipline, communication, and commitment. English underscored what OWI teachers already know: an online course is not easier than an onsite, face-to-face course and success requires time and engaged commitment (p. 85). While these seem obvious to the experienced instructor, these concepts can often be daunting for college students, especially first and second-year students. Student self-assessment often is included as part of orientations to online learning to enable them to self-gauge their preparation for taking an online class. The lack of preparation and readiness for online learning is one of the primary reasons students drop out of the courses. OWI Effective Practice 10.2 recommended that information be provided to students to help with study habits and skills (p. 22). One way to provide this information is through self-assessments that students can complete to help them understand their own habits. Students need to be encouraged to perform a self-assessment to determine whether their motivation and self-discipline are sufficient to keep them on track while taking an online course.

Such an intake also can provide the instructor with valuable data about the special needs of any disabled students enrolled in the course. Numerous self-assessment orientation modules are available online. One of the most widely used and adapted instruments is TOOLS (http://www.txwescetl.com/test-of-online-learning-success-tools/), which was created by Marcel Kerr of Texas Wesleyan College. It measures students' strengths and weaknesses regarding online learning including self-assessment information. (See Kerr, Rynearson & Kerr, 2006, for more information). This sort of detailed orientation affords students the opportunity to start the course better prepared technologically. Thus, they can spend their time and effort on the content of the course.

Finally, a key facet of online orientation for OWCs is an overview of the assignments, activities, and requirements in a class in addition to a list of minimal technological skills and personal skills necessary to succeed in OWCs (see Appendix for a Student Preparation Checklist). In the CCCC OWI Committee

national surveys (2011a, 2011b), only 6% of respondents reported that students need to be able to read or write well to succeed in an OWC. That is not to say that such basic literacy skills are not needed; indeed, according to Beth L. Hewett (2015a), these are especially crucial skills for learning to writing in online settings because of the heavy text-based literacy loads (see also Griffin & Minter, 2013 & Chapter 6). It seems possible that the survey respondents simply were not thinking in terms of such basic literacies or that the survey worded the questions poorly regarding this aspect of student preparedness. Since much of an OWC is mediated through texts, students need to be able to read and to be able to communicate their questions and concerns. Discipline-specific orientations may ask questions about how much students are willing to read and other concerns geared particularly to online writing. For OWI orientation, students should be asked to identify how they take in information best: aurally through audio; visually through images and text; and/or aurally and visually through audio/visual sound, images, and text (see Chapter 11 for teaching strategies engaging these media). OWI carries the capability to use both synchronous and asynchronous modalities (see Chapter 3) and multiple media; when students identify their learning preferences, they are better able to voice their learning needs in an orientation to the OWC, better enabling the teacher to meet those needs—again, an issue of access.

One concern of particular importance in OWCs is time commitment. Students will need to schedule time to read and write assignments, possibly view videos, and participate in collaborative activities such as class discussion and peer feedback, in addition to their other writing tasks. Jane Bozarth, Diane Chapman, and Laura LaMonica (2004) asked online students, "If you could have learned something about online learning prior to beginning an online course, what would have been helpful?" The most common response was knowledge of the time commitment required (p. 95). To ensure student success, Effective Practice 10.2 suggested that specific information be provided to students about the time needed for drafting, revising, and working with peer group members (p. 22). While provided time estimates do not need to be exact, anecdotally students often miscalculate the amount of time needed to read, study, and do assignments. They may have a misinformed belief that online courses—OWCs included—take less time than onsite courses. Offering a range of time, such as suggested in Chapter 10, can help students visualize their time commitment in real terms instead of something that somehow gets done in cyberspace.

Gather and Leverage Existing Data

Every postsecondary institution now can collect reams of data about students from a myriad of internal systems. With the ease of computing technologies that

can analyze and make sense of "big data," institutions are beginning to tap their own data assets to learn more about students and programs. According to Alyse Hachey, Katherine Conway, and Claire Wladis (2013), "Course and institutional management systems today collect a wealth of data on student characteristics, enrollment patterns and course outcomes that are not being utilized but are readily available for faculty and administrators to study ... to make thoughtful program improvement" (para. 1). WPAs and writing program faculty may be able to take advantage of such data to understand their student population and its learning needs better. For example, Di Xu & Shanna Smith Jaggers (2013) of the Community College Research Center compiled a dataset of nearly 500,000 courses take by over 40,000 students in the Washington State Community College system. This dataset is a prime example of leveraging existing data to find important trends and provide empirically based information on which to base decisions. Xu and Jaggers found that certain students (males, Black students, and younger students) had lower performance in online courses, and they extrapolated from these data the provocative suggestion that institutions could "redefine online learning as a student privilege rather than a right" in ways that would limit the types and kinds of courses a student could take online until the student proves they are ready (Community College Research Center, 2013, p. 25). In the context of OWI, using existing data (and gathering consistent data) could provide programs and instructors the leverage to make claims about student success and access to online learning, making more realistic decisions about who takes an OWC possible.

Most WPAs already are skilled in gathering student-generated data to facilitate assessment and program review in face-to-face courses, but as Virginia Tucker (2012) acknowledged, "Assessment in distance education is a topic of relatively recent study" (para. 2). Tucker explained that a distance writing program administrator (dWPA) needs a specific assessment strategy for online courses that is different from face-to-face strategies: "Understanding the particular assessment needs of a distance writing program allows a dWPA to better lead a conversation about programmatic assessment strategies" (para. 3; see also Chapter 6). While the dWPA should be able to gather information about assignments, exercises, and other pedagogical information from instructors, she most likely will need to ask for data about students and their accessing of the online platform from another location on campus. By leveraging institutional data in meaningful ways, institutions, WPAs, and instructors can provide necessary support structures that can increase student success in OWCs.

Limit Class Sizes to a Reasonable Number

OWI Principle 9 recommended that "OWCs should be capped responsibly

at 20 students per course with 15 being a preferable number" (p. 20). Smaller OWC sizes offer significant benefits to both students and instructors (see Chapter 6 for more detail). Perhaps the greatest benefit is that lower course caps provide instructors the opportunity to offer more frequent (and possibly more substantive or more helpful) formative feedback on student writing. Respondents to the CCCC OWI Committee surveys (2011a, 2011b) indicated that responding to student writing does not change when moved to an online environment—the work still is there. The same grading and feedback demands exist. If student numbers increased, then feedback would decrease, which would undermine the effectiveness of the course.

However, respondents overwhelmingly also cited time and grading/responses/feedback as the primary reasons for keeping course caps low. Indeed, many open-ended responses pointed to the extra written communication that is necessary when teaching online as a quantifiable way to justify smaller class sizes. However, other than grading- or assessment-related feedback, many respondents also indicated that interacting to students in other ways also increases their workload (e.g., commenting on discussion posts, crafting class announcements, responding to emails and questions). For example, one respondent wrote, "Online teaching requires a lot of intense email communication in the evenings—the more students I have, the longer this takes each night." Quite simply, OWI is a text-heavy teaching venue with teachers teaching primarily through their writing and not their oral capabilities (Hewett, 2015a). They are stretched by the literacy load in ways similar to students.

While WPAs and administrators initially might balk at what are perceived as relatively low course caps, they need to consider the importance of online student retention not only in OWCs but across the university. Just as onsite, face-to-face writing courses help universities with retention, so, too, can online courses—but only if students complete them successfully. Appropriate enrollments allow students to succeed long term at the university, thus paying dividends in the future as opposed to simply meeting short-term enrollment goals.

Provide and Fund Training for OWI Teachers

OWI Principle 8 advocated for OWI teachers to receive fair and equitable compensation for their work. Compensation needs to match the additional effort required to develop, teach, and revise online courses, as indicated in Chapters 6, 7, and 12. The literature has suggested that creating a new online course takes more time and research (Worley & Tesdell, 2009). However, only 44.7% of chief academic officers in the Babson survey agreed that online courses require more faculty time and effort (Allen & Seaman, 2013, p. 22). When this time and effort is not acknowledged and provided for by the institution, student

preparation is cheated, potentially leading to attrition and failure.

A consistent theme in the research that underscored the OWI principles was the need for instructors to participate in training before teaching online. Instructors also need ongoing professional development to keep up with new pedagogies and technology. To attend to these issues involves time and commitment that must come from other areas of faculty lives; thus to encourage faculty to participate in additional training and to compensate them for their time and efforts, OWI teachers need to be trained and funded for their professional commitment to teaching online. In Laura McGrath's (2008) national survey of OWI teachers, one instructor wrote that she could be better supported in her online teaching if her institution would "make it financially worthwhile to train to teach online." Hewett and Christa Ehmann (2004) similarly acknowledged that "precious few dollars are spent on teacher training, particularly on training that supersedes learning how to navigate a specific electronic platform and that addresses, instead, the pedagogy of online teaching and learning" (p. xiii). The trickle-down effect of professional training for OWI to improve student OWC experiences cannot be overstated. If the teachers are insufficiently prepared for OWI, the students lose.

Create More Support Structures for Students

Two particular areas of institutional support can facilitate student success. First, students need technology support throughout the course. OWI Effective Practice 10.4 stated that "the institution should provide 24/7, accessible technical support for any LMS or other approved software or technology used for meeting with or participating in the OWC. Teachers should not be considered the primary IT expert for the OWC" (p. 22). For some faculty this practice is, and will be for the foreseeable future, more dream than reality. Yet, if in essence the institution takes responsibility for IT orientation and support for all online courses, including OWCs, and if OWI teachers require students to complete an institution-driven orientation for the LMS when available, there will be fewer basic questions about using the LMS. If faculty further determine not to add unnecessary outside software to the course outside the LMS—and it is up to them to determine what is necessary or not—then another layer of technology frustration may be eliminated, thus enhancing inclusivity and accessibility (see OWI Principles 1, 2 & 10, as well as Chapter 14, to complicate the meaning of "necessary"). Writing faculty then will be left with a writing program-based necessity of helping students understand how the technology use changes in an OWC setting (OWI Principle 10). Of course, faculty should be cognizant that students might have limited access to and success with IT support systems, technology can fail, and that their job is to provide "accessible back-up plans for

when technology fails, either on their end or the institution's end," according to Effective Practice 10.6 (p. 22).

Second, students need access to online tutoring if they are to succeed, and ultimately, this provision of tutoring is an institutional consideration (unless the institution's Writing Center is purely driven and funded by the writing program, in which case responsibility for this provision belongs to the writing program). Errin Heyman (2010) noted that a key factor in relation to student retention is "student support and student connection with the institution" (para. 16). OWI Principle 13 underscored the need for online writing students to have support components that include tutoring and other online resources typically found onsite. It stated, "OWI students should be provided support components through online/digital media as a primary resource; they should have access to onsite support components as a secondary set of resources" (p. 26). Moreover, given Xu & Jaggers' (Community College Research Center, 2013) recent research suggesting that males, Black students and students who are in basic writing may need more support services to help them succeed (p. 23), it is incumbent on writing programs to provide it. Students with disabilities likely require additional support in all of these matters. Support services include tutoring, writing centers that have virtual components, and OWLs. Chapter 5 outlines these necessary components of OWI that helps to enable student success. In preparing *A Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for OWI*, the CCCC OWI Committee believed that online writing students are best supported by online writing tutoring; such tutoring needs to be funded, staffed with trained administrators and tutors (see OWI Principle 14, pp. 28-30), and advertised to students for their use.

Instructor Level

Accessibility

In recent research, Sushil Oswal and Lisa Meloncon (2014) discussed the need for instructors to "pay attention" to accessibility and disability in OWCs. This need is necessitated by the fact that there are a growing number of students with disabilities (Newman Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver., 2010; Snyder & Dillow, 2010). Some estimate students reporting a disability at 11% of undergraduates and 8% of graduate students (US Department of Education, 2012). Indeed, these numbers likely are low since many students with disabilities have a desire to forge an identity that is not related to their disability (Lightner, Kipps-Vaughan, Schulte, & Trice, 2012; Marshak, Van Wieren, Ferrell, Swiss, & Dugan, 2009). Other research has found that between 60-80% of students with disabilities choose not to disclose their challenges for any number of rea-

sons (Schelly, Davies, & Spooner, 2011; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005). In terms of the OWI principles, these numbers certainly are low given that the CCCC OWI Committee included among students needing inclusivity and access attention not only those who are physically disabled, but also those with identified learning challenges, those with multilingual language concerns, and those with socioeconomic disadvantages. To this end, the CCCC OWI Committee strongly believes that OWI Principle 1 should ground all of OWI—from the WPA to individual teachers. Oswal and Meloncon (2014) provided instructors with strategies for creating accessible online courses, including adequate preparation for instructors, incorporating universal design into the course structure, selecting an appropriate delivery tool, and building capacity within writing programs. The authors indicated that "The strategies provided are ways to get started because for accessibility to be effectively implemented across programs requires a fundamental shift in ideology; it requires starting with accessibility as a parallel to learning outcomes" (p. 294).

Course design and navigation are related intimately with accessibility concerns. Faculty and students are familiar with the materiality of the onsite writing classes where discussions, meetings, and instructor interaction have, for the most part, clear and sometimes tacit expectations. In onsite writing classes, students generally understand that teachers will be speaking from particular places in the classroom, that teachers take responsibility for beginning and ending class sessions, that the projector or chalkboard will contain important information, that students might be working in peer-review groups and how to do so, that they will be asked to write and hand in papers and how to do so, and what to expect in terms of teacher comments on those papers (although the content of comments may vary, they often still will be returned on hardcopy papers). In the online class, however, navigational structures replace the chairs, chalkboard, and projector of the classroom, and the structure of each online class has to be learned and interpreted. Courtney Shivetts (2011), who has written a comprehensive literature review on the importance of the learner in online learning, found that while student motivation is an important factor for student success, students are also highly dependent on course layout and accessibility. While these two findings will not surprise many readers—especially those readers who have taught online—they do afford educators the opportunity to reconsider the materiality of the online classroom in order to motivate and prepare students for OWI and make OWCs more accessible.

Because students encounter each new online class as if they were encountering a new online *classroom*, design issues are of paramount concern in OWCs. Cheng-Yuan Lee, Jeremy Dickerson, and Joe Winslow (2012) offered three organizational philosophies of online course structure: the fully autonomous ap-

proach, the basic guidelines approach, and the highly specified approach. Online rubrics, such as the Chico State Rubric for Online Instruction, make general, research-based recommendations about course design. Whatever the approach one takes, students may need various levels of assistance from the OWI teacher. For example, the OWC might be structured much like an onsite course in that there are a set number of major and minor writing assignments that will be graded, class discussion is expected about reading and writing strategies (albeit through text in the common OWC), and some peer work is anticipated. In this case, students would benefit from an analogy with onsite writing classes indicating similarities and differences, drawing on their past knowledge. They also would benefit from understanding where and how to access the syllabus, whether there is any changeability to the course calendar (and when and they might find out about changed schedules), where the assignments are provided, where to post formal assignments, where to post writing to peers, and where to post personal communications with the teacher, and the like. If the OWC is differently structured—such as in a fully workshop setting where different students receive whole-class feedback each week—students would benefit from a different sort of explanation regarding the class expectations and where and how to access course materials. Given the hundreds of variations that an OWC can take, it behooves teachers to keep inclusion and access in mind; students who do not know what to do may choose to do nothing at all, failing to ask the questions to which they believe others automatically know the answers. Students with visual impairments and learning disabilities in general struggle to keep up with course readings and might need direct communications via email about schedule revisions and other last minute changes.

The scholarship of teaching and learning has advocated consistently for course creation that is transparent. Transparency involves not only providing clear learning outcomes but also information about how those outcomes will be achieved and what is required of students. In one pilot study, the most frequent answer that students gave to the question, "if you could have learned something about online learning prior to beginning an online courses, what would have been helpful?" was that they needed to know instructor expectations (Bozarth, Chapman, & LaMonica, 2004, p. 95). For online classes, students need to have a clear understanding of instructor expectations, and this can be accomplished by consistent communication through multiple channels that reminds students of expectations and course objectives, according to OWI Effective practice 11.3 (p. 23; see also Warnock, 2009 & Chapter 4). These channels should be designed into the structure of the course, regardless the course structure.

These multiple channels with built-in redundancies are a crucial lifeline for students with learning disabilities for surviving in online environments. Online

courses not only need to provide students clear navigational pathways, instructions, and assignments, but online educators also need to be aware that students must relearn new patterns of navigation and systems for organization for each online class they encounter, meaning that the writing instruction might, at first, be slowed down as students learn to navigate a new online class. To this end, OWI teachers can provide basic, initial assignments designed to help students navigate the LMS while also beginning a purposeful reading and/or writing assignment.

Research the Profiles and Demographics of Students in OWCs

Closely related to the recommendation that institutions should access and leverage available data to understand online students better, instructors, too, should use institutional data to their advantage. These data can provide important insights to assist in course planning, development, and design. Resources, pedagogical approaches, and assignments that appeal to the unique characteristics of the students who gravitate toward online and technology-mediated course delivery in one's home institution (or in similar institutions regarding student population and levels offered) can only help those students succeed. For example, at the University of Cincinnati, the student body is comprised of 31% first-generation college students (University of Cincinnati, 2012, p. 73). Many online writing students are first generation and these students have particular issues that have been well documented such as lack of an understanding of college experience (Thayer, 2000; Vargas 2004) and lack of educational expectations and encouragement (Choy, 2001; Schmidt, 2003). Characteristics of such students may include pride in attempting college work and anxiety or fear of failing the family; when combined, these attributes may cause these students to take too many classes, not knowing what to expect from any one. In terms of taking online courses, first-generation students may come from impoverished or under-supported educational backgrounds, may have minimal Internet connection, and may be unfamiliar with using technology or with using it for educational purposes. With institutional data and a little research, OWI teachers can address the needs of such students when designing courses and throughout the term, all of which also applies to accessibility.

Building Community

The lack of a specified time and place to meet physically is one of the biggest barriers students must overcome when taking online courses. While instructors cannot control student motivation, they can encourage students to engage in an online course in a consistent manner. Even an asynchronous course that is built around an any time/anywhere learning philosophy can be aided by asking stu-

dents to login at particular times each week or informing them that teacher messages or updates will occur on a regular and predictable schedule. A recent study by Hilde Patron and Salvador Lopez (2011) has shown that consistency is a key factor to student success: "Students who log in more frequently and with less variation of minutes per day tend to get higher grades" (p. 6). One way to help students develop consistent practices in completing online course work can be accomplished by applying OWI Principle 11, which advocated for the construction of an online community to foster student success (pp. 23-24). Research has shown that online students who feel a sense of community are more likely to continue with the course (Ludwig-Harman & Dunlap, 2003; McCracken, 2004). Some ways that OWI faculty can inspire online community follow:

- Create ice breaker exercises that allow students to get comfortable with each other as they explore the online environment or new tasks associated with the online environment.
- Incorporate options such as blogging and expanded discussions that allow students to continue conversations begun in discussion boards; doing so also may give them a more active voice in the course and encourage them to take control of their learning.
- Provide students with an area where they can answer each other's questions and/or share information in their own community of practice.

An integral part of building community is for the instructor to be present, demonstrate personal desire to interact with students, and model what online interaction looks like. Unlike an onsite or hybrid class, where the instructor is clearly present or not present, obviously interacting with students or maintaining a distance from them, instructor presence is not always evident online. In the OWC, students "see" their instructors through online profiles, participation in discussion boards, announcements and other general communications, emails to students, audio/video files, and in synchronous activities (e.g., online chats, voice and video activities, synchronous lectures, or asynchronous sessions in the LMS). These activities—plus evaluated writing—are the only ways that students know the teacher is present and actively working with them; uncertainty about teacher-student connections may create anxiety or discomfort for some students, which might prompt excessive emails as students seek connection and instruction.

Margaret Edwards, Beth Perry, and K. Katherine Janzen (2011) found that students believed the best online instructors were those that engaged, demonstrated interaction, and intervened at strategic moments. Embedded in OWI Principle 11's effective practice examples is the concept of interactivity; teachers should take "full advantage of the flexibility of electronic communications"

in helping students both effectively navigate the course and effectively become writers (p. 13). Effective Practice 10.8 further recommended that "Students should be apprised of the time teachers will require for formal or informal conferences with teachers" (p. 23). Thus, teachers, as much as possible, should find ways to be present with students through student teacher conferences and office hours much as instructors would be in a face-to-face class.

The difference in "presence" in an online class comes to the forefront here. Not all OWI teachers are comfortable using the affordances of the LMS and other online applications that allow synchronous communication with students. Faculty who are present through asynchronous, written discussion boards and comments or feedback on students papers rely on students accessing those forms. In other words, in the asynchronous OWC, a student will only know if a professor is present in the class if s/he reads discussion boards, accesses and reads feedback, and checks his or her email or course messaging system. Changing this dynamic is not difficult. From an anecdotal perspective, OWI teachers may not realize how pleasantly surprising it can be to a student to receive even a very brief chat communication when both happen to be online. Reaching out with a friendly "hello" and "how is the class going for you?" on a synchronous text chat can open the student to an interpersonal relationship with the teacher that can be the difference between just surviving the term and thriving in the OWC.

Prepare Students for the Online Experience and for Academic Writing

Most of us have heard instructors indicate that students are not prepared for their online classes or that they believe that online courses will be less time-consuming or less difficult than onsite classes. Instructors also have reported that there is a "misperception among students that online courses would demand only that they log in once a week to get an assignment or provide a posting; instructors reported that students often seem surprised at the level of interaction and frequency of contact demanded by many courses" (Bozarth et al., 2004, p. 91). Often, students conflate online courses with independent study, self-paced, or correspondence courses (see Chapter 12). Students also might have experiences with introductory courses in other disciplines where assessment was a multiple-choice exam and courses required little writing or engagement. It is all too easy for students to extrapolate a similar situation for OWI; indeed, anecdotally speaking, we know that some teachers do teach their OWCs in just that manner with papers substituting for exams and little-to-no interpersonal connection developed. OWI Principle 7 was written to help OWI teachers move decidedly away from such OWC structures (CCCC OWI Committee, 2013).

Research has shown that students often do not realize the time and effort that is involved in taking an online *writing* course. According to Heyman (2010),

while such concerns as student motivation may be outside of the control of instructors and institutions, factors such as course structure and faculty support can have positive impacts on student satisfaction and retention (see also Street, 2010). A way to mitigate competing expectations is to employ Effective Practice 10.5, which encourages instructors to complete "trial runs" to help students get comfortable with the online environment (p. 22). These trial runs could be as simple as sending out announcements encouraging students to complete either the institutional- or instructor-created online orientations or as complex as asking students to post introductions and ask questions about the syllabus prior to the first day of class. These sorts of exercises and expectations help to introduce students to the online environment, the LMS, and the rigors of an online community that is essential in a writing course.

One of the first class periods and exercises should focus on the demands of an OWC. For example, many onsite writing courses provide a writing prompt for in-class writing exercises. Students could be asked to read a short text, locate additional information on the same topic, and then generate a short response text that needs to be posted to the discussion board. This same work of a sample writing prompted by a specific thought or question can be imported to the online environment. Hybrid courses may do this kind of writing in the onsite setting or fully online depending on the teacher's goals. Such an assignment migration can help to illustrate how difficult writing on the fly can be and encourage students to set aside focused time for reading and writing for other course assignments. This sort of immediate exercise helps to prepare students for the rigors of the course and allows them to better assess whether they are ready for an OWC.

In addition to preparing students before or in the early stages of the course, following are some examples of effective practices that enable students to be successful throughout the term. These examples build on Effective Practices 11.5 and 11.7 (p. 24). See Appendix 13.A directly following this chapter for an additional Student Preparation Checklist.

- Incorporate elements into the course that reinforce information that students either should have learned in an orientation and/or that instructors believe students must know before they can take the course.
- Include links to expand the syllabus.
- Provide multiple and redundant entry points into assignments or little nuggets of information to which students can hyperlink, giving them individualized experience. Recycle these assignments and information as useful in the course.
- Include multiple types and genres of assignments such a choose-your-own adventure, buffet-style learning that works really well online.
- Use the course materials as a model for expectations of student perfor-

mance (e.g., short video or audio that comments on their assignments that students can use as a model for peer review; commenting on a discussion thread in the same way that you would want students to comment)

- Create short exercises within the drop/add timeframe at your institution that can help identify whether students are ready for the OWC. For example, students can be asked to find a specific article in the library databases, download it, attach it to an email, and submit it through a particular portal in the LMS. Then, they can be asked to write a summary of the article in the discussion board. Or, students can be asked to submit a short biography and post it to a specific place on the discussion board or class roster.
- Create a short video that shows students where the pertinent information is on the course website and follow up with a short quiz in the LMS on information on the course structure and outcomes.
- Create and post a page in the LMS that lists contact information for technological problems. Most institutions have an IT office that deals with technology problems for the LMS or for student email. Locate resources either within your institution or that are available online outside the institution that can help students with common problems. For example, it is likely that librarians have a tutorial on how to locate research resources (and it is possible that a librarian will agree to meet your class virtually).
- Keep the technology as streamlined as possible. Students like multiple communicative channels, but they should be accessible without multiple logins or a series of different tools. Even if the LMS is not the perfect solution, it may be the best solution since students may have more familiarity with it—particularly if the institution has done a good job of orienting them to the LMS or if they are online course frequent fliers.
- Develop task-based or goal-oriented assignments and exercises.
- Vary or add use of synchronous sessions in peer editing, OWLs, or office hours to appeal to students' different learning styles.

Many of these examples are derived from advice offered by the CCCC OWI Committee Expert/Stakeholders' Panel (CCCC OWI Committee, 2011d, 2012a, & 2012b).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

No one-size-fits-all model exists for preparing students to take an OWC because students come from a wide variety of backgrounds, experiences, and ability levels. Student diversity means that OWI teachers have little control over being

fully prepared to address each student's past experiences and current motivation.

WPAs and their OWI teachers need to be vigilant in creating courses and program environments that prepare students to be successful. We can say with some confidence that being a successful online learner actually is not terribly different from being a successful face-to-face learner, yet there are areas of concern that must be addressed. To that end, to ensure students' success in online courses, institutions and instructors must prepare students for this experience (OWI Principle 10); they must create a sense of community (OWI Principle 11); and they must provide adequate support structures and resources (OWI Principle 13) (pp. 21-24, 26-28). Moreover, course design and content always should start with accessibility (OWI Principle 1, p. 7). Practices that we have found to be most successful at preparing online students include:

- Reaching out to students prior to the start of class to ensure that they understand the type of course and the workload of the course.
- Providing students with a technological and a personal self-assessment so they can adequately gauge their own preparation for an OWC.
- Providing students an online orientation to the technology, which should be done both at the institutional level (for technology and general online learning strategies) and the course level (for OWI-specific learning strategies). In both of these orientations, the specialized needs of students with disabilities must be covered.
- Offering students a detailed view of the structure of the course and course expectations.
- Creating a course that adheres to accessibility guidelines (see Chapters 8, 9, & 10)

Finally, writing studies needs additional empirical research (OWI Principle 15, pp. 31-32) across multiple institutions that bring students' expectations, experiences, and needs into the research process. In the evolution of OWCs, writing studies badly needs additional information in order to answer the question of how to prepare and empower students with a range of abilities to succeed in OWCs.

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APPENDIX: STUDENT PREPARATION CHECKLIST

Instructors can adapt this checklist for their own purposes. We recommend sending it to students prior to the first day of class.

- Know yourself and how you learn.
  - Are you able to accomplish tasks and assignments with little oversight?
  - Are you using any adaptive or assistive technology to access your online courses that require additional help from your instructor?
  - Do you need consistent reminders?
  - Are you able to manage your time well so you're not waiting until the last minute?
- Know your technology.
  - Do you know what kind of hardware and software that you have and what you may need?
  - Who is your ISP provider?
  - Is it reliable?
  - Is your Internet access "high speed"?
  - If you are using wireless Internet access, is it secure and reliable enough to download and upload files for this course?
  - Do you have current browsers and plug-ins?
  - Does the course LMS work well with your assistive technology (if applicable)?
- Know your LMS.
  - Are you familiar with the LMS? Take time to complete an orientation (if available), attend a training session, schedule a time with someone at the technology center, or schedule a time with your instructor to walk through the particulars of the system.
  - If you use assistive technology, does the course LMS work well with it?
- Know the basics of technological literacy.
  - Do you know how to upload a file? How to download a file?

    - Do you know how to attach a file to an email?
    - Do you understand how to use "commenting" and "track changes" features in Microsoft Word?
    - Do you know how to change the margins in a Word document?
    - Do you feel comfortable using "commenting" and "track changes" features if you access Word with assistive technology?
- Know your own comfort levels with reading and writing—both online and using hardcopy books and articles. Online courses are mediated through technology but rely in large part on the use of texts.
    - How confident are you in your ability to read and understand complex but general reading material?
    - How confident are you in your ability to communicate via writing?
- Know how to ask a good question.
    - What are good questions? They are questions that show the student has done some of the thinking required but needs additional help and guidance.
    - How comfortable are you in asking questions of the professor publicly?
    - How comfortable are you in asking questions of the professor privately?
- Know where to go for help.
    - Do you know the contact information for technology support (IT) on campus?
    - Do you know the contact information for the writing center?
    - Do you know how the online writing center can help you with your writing?