Fundamentals Before Course Play

You can't play a game of golf without knowing some of the basic rules. Golf like all sports has a set of rules that are clear and specific. However, like all sports golf also has unwritten rules that you learn by experience and playing with other people. So, to set you up, we wanted to provide you with some fundamentals of the game. Well not really…because our book isn't a game…but you get the picture. We wanted to aid you in understanding what PARS is and how it might be applied within the chapters of this text.

Therefore, this first chapter, authored by us, your editors, provides a foundational base for the PARS framework and its application to writing program leadership. We provide a brief overview of the PARS framework in case you are not familiar with it and then we explore each of the PARS elements (personal, accessible, responsive, strategic) as they apply to running a writing program with online courses. We hope you will enjoy the list like format for some quick tips and tricks on how you can be a better leader, support your faculty with purpose, and create and maintain the online courses in your program so that students enjoy them and are successful taking them.

Chapter 1. PARS for Writing Program Administration

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Abstract: This first chapter provides a brief overview of the PARS framework and how that framework can be used in a writing program that has online courses as part of the program offerings. In this chapter we cover each PARS element and explore the layers of design, instruction, and administration for program leaders. Each section highlights ways that program leaders can use specific techniques that align with the PARS framework to better support their faculty, to craft a stronger more effective writing program, and to create better user experiences for the students taking their classes.

Keywords: online writing instruction (OWI), personal, accessible, responsive, strategic (PARS), program leaders, design, instruction, administration

As you get started with this collection, we thought it would be useful to provide an overview of the functionality of PARS for administrators, that is, how each letter works to ensure you have a program that is focused on being personal, accessible, responsive, and strategic. In our first book, we provided an overview of PARS for administration in each lettered chapter because administration is one of the PARS layers (design, instruction, administration). However, the layers of PARS are obviously interconnected (you have to design a course for it to be instructed and administered), and this interconnectedness is what makes up the entire user experience.

So, for each of the PARS letters, we will quickly highlight how you can consider the layers (design, instruction, administration) in your own program. Use the PARS approach to guide your course (design and administration) and your interaction with students (instruction). Keep it simple (online teaching doesn't have to be elaborate). Remember, you are creating and participating in an experience alongside your faculty (if you're an administrator) and students, so keep notes and think about what did and did not work, and be ready to iterate.

Personal

For us, personal is self-explanatory. Don't act like a computer/machine; be a human instead. Writing is personal and teaching is personal, so make it that way in

your online writing programs/courses. Focus your efforts as an administrator on making a connection beyond content delivery, and help your instructors make a connection beyond teaching the content and assigning course grades. As an administrator, build a community in your department, and help foster positive interactions between you and your instructors. Encourage your instructors to do the same with their courses and students.

Personal Design

When designing online writing courses for or with your faculty team, consider the following to make the design more personal:

- Use colors and images on the content pages in the learning management system.
- Ensure the tone of your course content (e.g., announcements, assignments, and discussion prompts) is upbeat/friendly/inviting.
- Make your instructors create an introduction video or bio post in the discussion forum and share research interests with students.
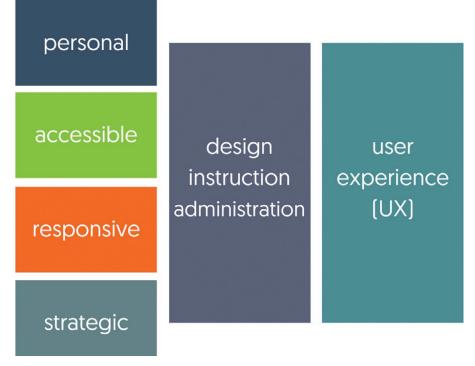- Have your instructors put their picture on the syllabus.

*Figure 1.1. PARS+UX=OWI. Created by Kate Fedewa,
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Personal Instruction

As you work with your instructors and coach them in their instruction of the online writing courses in your program, encourage them to be caring and compassionate in their communication with students, to show they are human. Model this by example in the way you communicate with your instructors. Additionally, as you train them in some of the differences in teaching online versus other modalities, encourage instructors to do the following:

- Create an information office card with their contact information on it and share personal information (hobbies/interests) with students
- Add a picture to their email account and learning management system (LMS) profile
- Have students complete an ice breaker activity early in the course
- Hold virtual office hours, send weekly "check-in" emails to students, or contact students by phone or via Zoom

Personal Administration

In your day-to-day work as an administrator, try to be as personal as you can with faculty and staff. Focus on supporting your staff in whatever way you can! Hold virtual administrator office hours, and/or work in weekly check-ins (meetings or emails) with your staff. Remind them you are there for them. Consider hosting weekly or monthly "lunch and learns" to share online teaching/LMS tips and tricks and talk about what they're doing in their courses. Remind your faculty that you've been there, you've had challenges and successes as an instructor yourself. Remember, your faculty and their students might come to you with problems, and it's your job to advocate for them both. Here are some other ways to make your administration style more personal:

- Provide online training sessions on specific topics, such as workload management, discussion participation, and grading expectations.
- Send reminders of the academic and personal school/program resources so your faculty know about them.
- Ensure your staff have access to internet speeds and technology that can support the work they will be doing.
- Work with faculty to create a backup plan for personal emergencies.

Accessible

When we talk about creating accessible programs and courses, we're talking about removing barriers to learning and leveling the playing field for learners. We're not just talking about compliance with the Americans with Disabilities

Act (ADA), though that is very important! When we talk about accessibility, we're focused on things like making accessible content, having an accessible navigation in your LMS, and being accessible to your faculty and, if you're an instructor, your students.

Accessible Design

As you design your courses alone or with a team of instructors, make sure you're thinking about the affordances of the modality. That is, don't just put content built for face-to-face courses into an online space. Instead, take advantage of the affordances of a digital learning environment and design for it. Make sure that if you use something built for a face-to-face course you adapt it to work in a synchronous or asynchronous online setting and you ensure it's accessible. Re-imagine and test assignments for digital spaces before deploying them to your students. Also consider how students will access the content, and ensure you use file formats that they can open (e.g., Word, PDF, Google Docs, static LMS content pages). Most importantly, make sure your courses meet ADA compliance standards for online courses. We encourage you, as the administrator, to do the following things as you and your team design your online writing courses (OWCs):

- Provide faculty with exemplary OWC examples. Teach them some basic accessible course design best practices related to
  - LMS tools/navigation
  - modules or chunking
  - file formats and file naming
- Simplify the navigation in the LMS.
  - Limit the choices that students have to pick from on the left navigation.
  - Consider how many times students have to click to open something (the fewer clicks the better).
- Use videos! But when you use videos, keep them short (five minutes or less), and make sure you caption them or provide a written script.
- Ensure you create (or adapt) assignments that allow for flexible submission formats as some students may be working only from their cell phones.

Accessible Instruction

As you work with your instructors on coaching and training them to teach online, help them understand how to be accessible in a myriad of ways. Help them understand what ADA compliance is and how to incorporate some best practices of accessibility into their classes. Explain to your instructors how ADA accommodations work and what kinds of accommodations students might expect. Ensure that your instructors know how to provide various accommodations and

how to get in touch with your accessibility office. Aid your instructors in planning and creating points of contact where they are able to connect and engage with their students. Lastly, encourage your instructors to:

- Provide content for different learning styles (audio, text, video, interactive readings)
- Explain LMS access to their students in a video or live session and post LMS resources
- Make a video that walks students through where things are in the course; finding content shouldn't be a barrier to learning it!
- Advertise their availability (how to contact them and when) and how students can contact their peers if they want to create study groups

Accessible Administration

Consider how you can be a more accessible administrator and what habits or routines you can adopt to model best practices of accessibility for your instructors. We encourage you to note your availability and how/when your faculty can get in touch with you. Considering some of the basic "rules/expectations" of your program is also part of accessible administration. Just as students want to know the expectations, faculty deserve to know them too. Before the semester and faculty training begin, make a decision on some of the very basic day-to-day items, such as whether or not your instructors should hold office hours, or whether or not you want to have grading turnaround time frames. Not making a decision on these things *is making a decision*. As you work with your faculty, also consider doing the following:

- Make sure faculty know how to get in touch with tech support if they have issues with technology.
- Create and convey clear expectations for
  ◦ grading turnaround for assignments, including longer written ones and shorter ones like discussions or quizzes
  ◦ response times for emails and questions
- Ensure faculty have access to the things they will need to do their jobs, such as
  ◦ hardware
  ◦ software
  ◦ orientation to the LMS
  ◦ support documents
- Aid faculty in understanding grading issues and processes for
  ◦ plagiarism
  ◦ complaints
  ◦ incompletes

Responsive

For administrators, responsive OWI is about establishing guidelines for *how* you're going to respond to your instructors/students and *when* you're going to respond. It's about setting real expectations and turnaround times so that you're responding to solve student problems early. The responsive part of OWI for us is about establishing a pattern or routine for how you administer and/or teach your online writing courses. So, as you read through this section, consider the how and when.

Responsive Design

When designing your online writing courses, either as the administrator or along with your instructional team, ensure you have designed places in the course where instructors can post their availability, including days off and office hours, as well as response times for grading and email. Encourage a course design that provides students with the following information:

- How/when/where the class meets
    - Is it all asynchronous or synchronous?
    - Is there a synchronous meeting time?
    - Are you using the college LMS or another platform?
- A calendar for planning ahead that includes
    - major writing assignments
    - smaller assignments (e.g., Eli Review; discussion posts; shorter writing assignments, such as journals)
    - peer reviews
    - group work
    - synchronous meeting times (if applicable)
- Program(s) you'll use beyond the LMS, such as
    - Eli Review
    - Google Docs
    - social media (e.g., Instagram, Twitter, Facebook)
- How they will be graded (contract grading; portfolio grading; standard grading using points, percentages, or scales)

Responsive Instruction

As you think about training your instructors to teach online, you'll want to encourage them to develop their own routines and identify their own hows and whens. Some instructors, especially those new to online instruction, will need help creating their own patterns and routines, and sometimes that takes time, trial, and error. Encourage your instructors to think about the following.

***How* they are going to respond to their students?**

- What course platform they will use (e.g., LMS, Zoom, Google Meet)
- How they will respond to their students' writing
  ◦ end comments
  ◦ in-text comments
  ◦ LMS commenting feature
  ◦ Microsoft Suite commenting
  ◦ Google Docs commenting
- What kind of responses they will make in the discussions
  ◦ general ones to the whole class
  ◦ individual ones to each student

***When* they are going to respond to their students?**

- When they will participate in the class and what days of the week they will take off
- When they will hold office hours and when they'll be available for asynchronous emailing or chatting via the LMS
- When they will give feedback on student work
  ◦ discussions (24-48 hours)
  ◦ shorter assignments and quizzes (48-72 hours)
  ◦ longer assignments (3-5 days)
  ◦ email responses (24-48 hours)

Responsive Administration

As you think about your own administration style, make sure you also think about your hows and whens. Responsive administration is much like responsive instruction except that you're being responsive for your faculty and staff instead of your students. Responsive administration is about identifying various responsive strategies and then figuring out how and when you'll participate in them. For example, consider

- Aiming to respond quickly to email when you can and notifying your faculty and staff of your email response timeframe (24 hours? 48 hours? 72 hours? Weekend availability?)
- Holding WPA office hours and making sure you convey your availability to your staff, including when (e.g., weekly, biweekly, monthly) and where (e.g., Zoom, F2F, Google Meet)
- Facilitating a department space in your college's LMS, Slack, or MSTeams where you can post resources
- Developing workflow systems for things like course observations and annual/biannual faculty evaluations

Strategic

When we talk about our PARS approach, we note that everything comes together with strategy! Strategy is the biggest part of being an online administrator and instructor. Strategy gels the PARS layers (design, instruction, administration), and it aids you in creating and facilitating a superior student user experience.

Strategic Design

The grounding point in all course design is strategy. You have to have a plan, and you have to be able to carry out that plan in the content and design of your course. As you work to create your online writing courses, either with your team or by yourself as the administrator, make sure you

- Plan your personal course design by
    ◦ considering where you can put images and videos
    ◦ considering where you can incorporate color
    ◦ including instructor information
- Plan your accessible course design by
    ◦ simplifying the course navigation
    ◦ creating assignments that can be submitted in multiple formats
    ◦ ensuring content caters to different learning styles
- Plan your responsive course design by
    ◦ providing information about when/where/how the course meets
    ◦ providing a course calendar
    ◦ conveying grading policies, email response times, and office hours times and locations

Strategic Instruction

As you work with your instructors on creating their strategic plan for instructing their online writing courses, make sure you help them

- Plan their personal instruction strategy, making their presence known and connecting with the students so that they see their instructor as a real live person and not just a computer
- Plan their accessible instruction strategy, including planning their audios and videos so that they can aid students in accessing the material of their courses
- Plan their responsive instruction strategy so they know how and when they will give feedback
- Plan out their teaching to determine where in the course they can best insert themselves as a teacher and make the most impact. Encourage them to think about their participation in the course.

- ◦ Will they be present in the discussions or have a student be the discussion moderator each week?
- ◦ How many days will they be "present" in the course?
- ◦ How will they respond to students (as a group? individually?)
- ◦ What kind of posts will they make?

Strategic Administration

Just as you must help your instructors think about their strategic plan for teaching, you should also think about your strategic plan for administering your program. All managers must be strategic in their decisions and have a plan for how they get the work done. All managers must be prepared to handle things they didn't plan for, and they must be agile in their approach. As you think about your own strategic management plan, you should also consider

- Planning your **personal** administrative strategy; how will you show your faculty you are someone they can trust?
- Planning your **accessible** administrative strategy and making a plan for how you'll help your faculty with things they will need to do their jobs
- Planning your **responsive** administrative strategy, including how and when you'll communicate with faculty and staff
- Strategizing how you'll prepare your online instructors for teaching different student demographics, such as
  - ◦ underprepared students
  - ◦ ESL students
  - ◦ students with learning disabilities
  - ◦ working students with families
  - ◦ first-generation college students
  - ◦ returning students