



## Halfway Through the Course!

Part of being a professional or amateur golfer is practice and training. Golf is a lifelong sport and one that you continue to improve upon the more you play, practice, and train.

You've heard us say many times that we see online writing instruction (OWI) similarly to golf: the more you do it the better you get at it. We feel the same about leading a program: the more you run into as an administrator, the longer you've done it, and the more you put into it, the more you get better at the job.

Training and professional development is especially important for newer OWI instructors and those functioning as graduate teaching assistants (TAs). What we like about Miranda Egger's chapter is that she clearly states the long-standing problem of training and preparation as related to OWI that has existed for over a decade. Egger's chapter illustrates how program leaders could adapt some of her practices to get their instructors more OWI-specific training.

We really like Egger's insistence on OWI-specific scholarship, especially considering the recent COVID-19 pandemic and shift to emergency remote instruction. At this time, many taught writing online with little or no training and little to no OWI-specific training. Egger's chapter makes the case that the decade+ of OWI-specific scholarship is vastly important in training new instructors and graduate TAs to teach writing online.

# Chapter 11. Professionalizing from the Fringe: Informally Supporting Teaching Assistants via (and Welcoming Them Into) the OWI Community

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**Abstract:** Teaching assistants (TAs or GTAs) are our field's newest emerging teacher-scholars, graduate students who commonly move through a training protocol to help them confidently enter the first-year composition (FYC) classroom. These TAs are typically supported by a small cohort of peers, experienced faculty, collaboratively engaging with grounding, evocative theory—and participating in a practicum course that helps bring this network of supportive components together. It's not uncommon for those same TAs to go on to teach online iterations of FYC, but this time from the fringe—with no new practicum, no new cohort, no new formalized faculty support, and no additional scholarship to support their practice. At best, the implication is that the learning they did about current scholarship in composition studies during the practicum automatically translates to the online learning environment. At worst, this lack of new training leaves these novice teachers to struggle and to assume that online writing instruction (OWI) scholarship doesn't exist, doesn't matter, and isn't necessary to foster student success. Those of us fully immersed in OWI know otherwise, and many teacher-scholars have made the call for OWI training for new (and new-to-online) educators. I echo that call, but in this chapter, I present and illustrate the benefits of an informal Practicum+ model for doing so in light of competing priorities for resources.

**Keywords:** writing program administration, OWI, training, support, teaching assistants

I taught my first college-level class in 2000. I was 24 years old, far more concerned about the performance of teaching—rather, how badly my hands might shake in front of the students—than about successful facilitation of content using the available means within a specific learning environment. I wanted to succeed, but to my novice self, *succeed* meant not tripping on computer wires or panicking in response to a student question. The only thing that woke me up from my hyper-focused attention on superficial performance was the opportunity to see the wider world of rhetoric, composition, and writing studies (RCWS) via the graduate practicum course. I was still nervous each time I stepped up to the podium,

but I began to feel supported by the hint of a tradition guiding me along the way. When I taught my first asynchronous online composition course in 2010, I was (to extend the golf metaphor that Jessie Borgman and Casey McArdle often use with PARS) back to teeing up to hit a ball towards a green I couldn't see, with someone else's equipment, alone, and without a sense of a foundation holding me firm. I hadn't seen any professional community for online writing instruction (OWI), and nothing indicated—not colleagues, not Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) sessions—that OWI scholarship and supportive professional communities existed. Absent that kind of community, I relied on my own limited reasoning, which led me to believe that the best ways to teach in the traditional, synchronous classroom would also be the best ways to teach in the asynchronous classroom and that any changes in performance were due to students' abilities or an inherent deficiency in asynchronous learning spaces, not my inexperienced facilitation. This is a common shortsighted trope, widely expressed in articles about the damned nature of online learning, even today.

These days, I serve as assistant director of composition at the University of Colorado Denver—a public, urban, Hispanic-serving research university with roughly 15,000 students<sup>1</sup>, often dubbed a “commuter” campus to indicate the high proportion of nontraditional students. My responsibilities include supporting composition teachers, especially our latest graduate teaching assistants (TAs). Additionally, I recently took on the role of English department liaison for online writing instruction and, as such, my responsibilities extend specifically to *online* writing instruction. That means, of course, that I have a reason to closely examine the barriers that our OWI faculty face, especially our graduate teaching assistants who *might* take on an online course and find themselves floundering, swinging their own brand-new clubs towards a green they cannot clearly see, *still* not recognizing that a network of OWI-specific professional support does exist. The effect of this support-free transition to OWI is not only struggling online students and classes dogged with high DFW<sup>2</sup> and attrition rates<sup>3</sup> but also an ongoing reluctance to teach in online environments and a habit of perpetuating tired myths that online instruction is inherently less effective than traditional face-to-face (F2F) courses. This all means that, despite the growth in OWI research and scholarship, we are continuing to send teacher-scholars into the broader field of RCWS with no clear sense of OWI as a thread of scholarship worth pursuing.

At this point, after 30 years, we may have validated OWI as a field of study

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1. At my home institution, 49 percent of freshmen are first-generation college students, and 42 percent of students identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC).

2. DFW refers to the rate of students who do not successfully meet core competency standards and cannot pass this core requirement because they have earned a grade less than C—a D, F, or a W.

3. In our composition classes, online classes have more than double the attrition rates of traditional F2F classes.

and practice, but are we sharing that tradition in replicable ways with our newest teacher-scholars? And, have we designed training protocols that connect local sites to the larger network of support in visible ways that honor personal teaching styles but buttress them with foundational, shareable principles—like PARS and the 13 OWI principles in the 2013 CCCC OWI Position Statement? In this chapter, I describe a Practicum+ model as an informal means to support new OWI TAs and help better professionalize a new generation of OWI teacher-scholars.

## Theory and Practice

The theoretical foundation that ties our individual local contexts to a broader, connective network of better practices is already well established. I didn't have to look far to find sets of values necessary to design online facilitation that is particular to all local contexts and individual teacher styles: the four elements of **Personal, Accessible, Responsive, and Strategic**, coupled with the Principles of OWI (2013), provide a comprehensive picture of OWI-centric values to aim for as we posture ourselves at the first tee of a new course.

My own local context is not at all atypical. Every fall, a new cohort of graduate students teach a first-year composition course, the first of a two-course core sequence requirement. The TAs learn and build their own teaching practice during a four-day, pre-semester orientation crash course in composition studies and throughout the fall practicum, which is a credit-bearing, in-person graduate seminar. My writing program administrator (WPA) colleague, Dr. Rodney Herring, and I have experimented with variations of the composition pedagogy to hand to new TAs but have aimed for a balance between structure and autonomy. The assignment sequence is set for them in advance, and all TAs use the same textbook; beyond that structure, then, is where instructor autonomy begins to take shape: each new TA adapts the major assignments, chooses the controversy as a course theme and the readings related to that controversy, and designs daily class activities that help students successfully achieve the goals of each separate assignment.

While my department is highly supportive in the preparation of new teachers generally, that support hasn't yet yielded formal resources for new-to-online professional development<sup>4</sup>. Still, the department has an emerging interest in studying and improving the learning experience in online spaces amid increasing demands for online course options as well as a growing concern that equity gaps are expanding and rates of success are disproportionately low within online learning spaces. In alignment with the circumstances that dominate most students' decisions to take online classes (Wu & Hiltz, 2004), our

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4. As is common in most large universities, CU Denver has a dedicated ODE (Office of Digital Education) that serves many faculty professional training needs when it comes to online education, but there is no OWI-specific professional development.

students typically report that flexibility is key to the decision to enroll in an online course. The students at my home university are often working full-time or holding down multiple jobs, taking care of family, and managing their own health issues—meaning online courses are often their only viable option. Consequently, the number of students enrolled in online learning spaces is rising rapidly (Martinez et al., 2020). See Figure 11.1 for online enrollment growth at my home institution since 2013.

In spring 2020 (just before the COVID-19 pandemic), 33 percent of all the English courses in my home department were offered online to meet student demand, and, like at most large public universities, the demand for online courses has far outpaced the professional support structures (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Students aren't the only ones who increasingly demand online options yet report dissatisfaction with their experience. According to the CCCC Committee for Best Practices in Online Writing Instruction's 2011 *Report of the State of the Art of OWI*, faculty are also dissatisfied with the departmental support, which leads to “poor teaching, low expectations [for students and for online courses] and insufficient retention of experienced instructors,” despite the growth in demand (CCCC State of the Art, 2011, p. 12; CCCC State of the Art, 2021). Students and faculty are experiencing a growing list of demands on their lives, their health, and their financial well-being, and the problem is only growing more and more urgent. Those demands mean that online courses are ideal for many students; however, their experiences aren't yet aligning with the students' and faculties' reported satisfaction with the online learning experience (Hewett et al., 2011). We clearly have a problem to solve in OWI and an opportunity to invite and support new-to-online educators into this field of study more effectively.

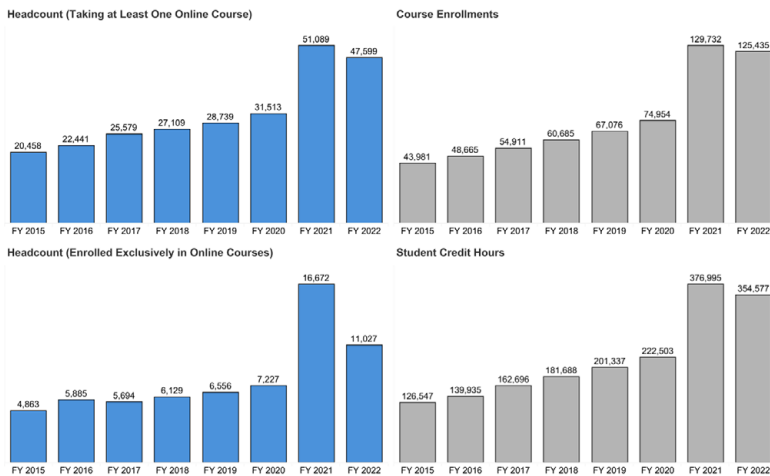


Figure 11.1. Online enrollment figures. Data retrieved from <https://www.cu.edu/online-enrollment>.

## Addressing the Problem

I'm not the first teacher-scholar who has sought to meet the growing demand and mitigate dissatisfaction by designing opportunities to support new and new-to-online instructors in OWI. Since training for new online teachers is non-existent at many institutions (Borgman & McArdle, 2019; Bourelle & Hewett, 2017; Hewett & Ehmann, 2004; Mechenbier, 2015), these teacher-scholars have creatively forged their own brand of local support. For example, Tiffany Bourelle's (2016) eComp was designed as a seminar that their GTAs could opt into after successfully completing the traditional practicum course and teaching F2F for one full semester. Likewise, N. Claire Jackson and Andrea Olinger (2021), Kelli Cargile Cook (2007), and David Grover et al. (2017), in lieu of a formal graduate seminar, designed a certificate-based, six-week mini-course in OWI. GSOLE (the Global Society of Online Literacy Educators) offers a similar certification process, designed by experts in the field and open to all interested OWI educators, that includes eight modules designed to be engaged over a full semester with a small cohort.

Despite the value of these responsive efforts, the circumstances at my own institution demand a less formal solution, one that could work concurrently with the traditional practicum. The initial opportunity presented itself in the Fall 2018 semester. We had three new TAs that, for reasons beyond our control, agreed to teach Core Composition I in an asynchronous online classroom, using Canvas (our institution's learning management system [LMS]). These three graduate students were new to teaching and especially new to *online* teaching (none had even taken an online course before). Each was enrolled in the typical practicum, along with nine graduate student peers, but the typical practicum was not designed to support this new *online* teaching challenge. Dr. Herring and I decided to add a new component to the practicum—an additional one hour/week meeting time that was dedicated solely to online writing instruction mentorship. I have since come to refer to this model as Practicum+.

For the university administrators, this pilot OWI TA program offered new teachers an intermediary teaching experience in order to gain the confidence they needed to transition to the traditional, in-person classroom. However, for me, this was the opportunity I'd been hoping for—a chance to design and use professional development materials to best support brand-new teachers as they solve the “theoretical, pedagogical, and technological puzzles of . . . on-line courses” (Cargile Cook, 2005); present best practices; and provide the tools necessary to make pedagogical choices of rhetorical awareness, writing, reading, access, and equity in digital learning spaces. For me, the new Practicum+ model was not a stepping stone to serve more traditional learning environments but an end in and of itself—one that could be designed for flexibility and sustainability.

I found two elements key to this Practicum+ model:

- an asynchronous OWI guide that introduces practical PARS-based tips for practice, complete with citations that show a wide foundational range of scholarship
- weekly informal meeting space with the OWI TAs to share practical concerns with OWI-related instruction and co-construct weekly activities

## The OWI Guide

I kept my more subversive goals of permanently adding an OWI component to our graduate training to myself but designed the materials with that larger goal in mind. The material of this guide was not based solely on the lore that Beth Hewett and Scott Warnock (2015) argue commonly governs such novice endeavors (though I believe strongly in that lore). Rather, the goal was to illustrate, in a snapshot, that there is a strong OWI community of scholarship from which to draw practical tips. Drawing primarily from foundational values, like the OWI principles (2013) and PARS (Borgman & McArdle, 2019), I designed a new and new-to-online faculty reference guide.

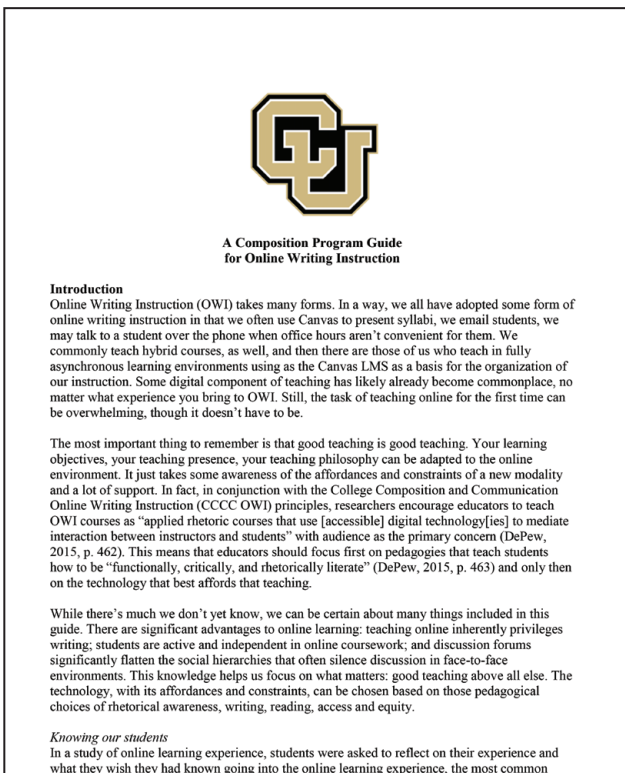


Figure 11.2. This image is the first page of the OWI Guide, where its purpose is described.

Your presence is important to the online learning environment and is forged, in large part, by facilitating discourse (Anderson et al., 2001). This purpose includes discourse that helps students challenge misconceptions and guide them to higher levels of thinking, reflective practice, and examining assumptions (Strategic). Further, facilitating discourse (through discussion) is essential to maintain interest, motivation, and engagement of students, to make their learning active, and to maintain teacher presence (Personal).

Your presence can look different, depending on the goals of the discussion (Strategic). You might act as: Generative Guide, Conceptual Facilitator, Reflective Guide, Personal Muse, and/or Mediator (Warnock, 2009, p. 73-74).

*Figure 11.3 Addressing Asynchronous Discussions*

The guide goes on to offer practical tips for engaging students in online discussions, inviting OWI educators to consider themselves thoughtful designers in seven key areas of consideration: Introduction (purpose of the guide, knowing our local students), OWI Principles and PARS, Designing for Accessibility and Inclusivity, Designing for Multilingual Students, Designing for Multimodality, Designing Asynchronous Discussions, and Building Relationships in Online Spaces. These seven key areas draw content from the myriad scholarship already present among scholars in the field, but they were chosen to reflect local values and pedagogical principles. Figure 11.4 from the OWI Guide lists tips specific to designing for accessibility and was adapted from a variety of sources—some within OWI (e.g., Coombs, 2010) and some from disability studies (e.g., Oswal, 2015; Vidali, 2021).

### Practicum+ Weekly Meetings

This guide was merely a starting point, a static resource to ground discussions in OWI scholarship. The strength of the Practicum+ model for supporting new OWI TAs lies in the weekly meetings that ran concurrent with their first OWI experience. These meetings were our way to honor the OWI principles' (2013) efforts to provide experienced OWI mentorship (Principle 7), satisfying interaction among new TAs (Principle 7) and ample opportunities for reflection (Principle 15), and to make the application of the PARS values common and natural within discussions of pedagogical design.

To that end, Dr. Herring and I met with the three OWI TAs once a week for one hour, in addition to the traditional practicum course meeting time. In those meetings, we co-designed weekly OWI activities within the already-built infrastructure (i.e., three major assignments and a final portfolio), offered guidance to better align weekly objectives with major course outcomes, and aligned pedagogical goals with technical *tools* to best achieve those goals.



Rather than perpetuating a “deficit” model by retrofitting course design for a student brave enough to disclose a disability to a system that will judge them, we should facilitate our OWI course in a way that flexibly presents information and reduces common barriers.

Tips for providing access to students with disabilities:

- Be **STRATEGIC** & make it **ACCESSIBLE**:
  - Include a disability statement on your syllabi up front (not buried at the end; Vidali, 2021).
  - Vary modes of content delivery, including feedback (consider asynchronous audio or video feedback as well as text-based feedback). Include a combination of text and images to best serve all readers (Schriver, 2013).
  - Caption all videos (YouTube provides auto-captioning that can be edited for accuracy) and post audio lecture scripts for all audio lectures.
- Make it **PERSONAL** & be **RESPONSIVE**:
  - Don’t forget to simply ask the student what they might need to facilitate the best possible learning experience. Disabled students, like all students, have diverse needs and skill levels that necessitate addressing their learning individually (Oswal, 2015).

*Figure 11.4 Designing for Accessibility*

We built general sketches of weekly activities together, yet each TA had the autonomy to choose how to fashion those weekly assignments according to their own voice, their own style. For example, after discussing the value of peer review and the technological affordances of this digitally based exercise, each TA took those goals and designed an online peer review prompt that suited their own style (see Figures 11.5-11.7).

While a semester-long, graduate seminar would have been ideal, the circumstances didn’t allow for such ideal measures. We had to be careful not to design the Practicum+ as a credit-bearing course, with assigned texts, time to write about OWI teaching philosophies, or even time to explore theory. Instead, I wrote that collection of scholarship into the guide and used the scholarship to craft my own questions and tips in response to the practical concerns brought up by the OWI TAs in the Practicum+ meetings. For example, I knew that when online students were asked to reflect on their experience and what they wish they had known going into the online learning experience, the most common answer given was a clear sense of “instructor expectations” (Bozarth et al., 2004), so we reviewed assignment sheets and rubrics for clear expectations together. We also know that students often just stop attending when they feel overwhelmed with the confusion of having multiple courses using varied online learning systems with varied goals.

## Revising and Editing (ER1)

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Begin this week by reading chapter 9 "Revision" (pp. 107-117) and chapter 10 "Style" (pp. 121-130) in your textbook. Understanding what revision is - as opposed to editing - and why both are crucial will lead us into the next major assignment: [Revision Project](#).

For this project, you will select one of the major papers, either the Rhetorical Analysis or Entering the Conversation, and see again what you've done and how it can be improved. While you can choose either, it may be best to choose the Rhetorical Analysis since you already have feedback on it. However, don't let this limit you. If you would like to revise the Entering the Conversation paper, let me know and I will return comments to you as quickly as I can.

For this assignment, use the following questions to begin editing the paper you have chosen for revision. Don't merely answer these questions, but open your paper and highlight problem areas for later revision.

Begin with **paragraph level** and focus on content:

1. Re-read your **thesis**. Are you able to locate your thesis clearly and easily? Does your thesis accurately represent what your paper is trying to argue? Highlight your thesis in **red**. If your thesis is unclear or needs modification after a re-reading, fix this during the revision process.
2. Within each body paragraph, you should have a **topic sentence** or claim that you remain focused on. Highlight each claim in **orange**. If you stray from this claim, highlight this sentence in **yellow** to edit later, move elsewhere, or delete entirely.
3. All claims should also have **evidence**, highlight each piece in **green**. If a paragraph or claim does not have evidence/highlight, come back to add support during revision.
4. Finally, all evidence should have **analysis** that ties the evidence to the thesis. Highlight where you analyze the evidence in **blue**. If you do not have analysis/highlight, come back and analyze your evidence during revision.

Now, focus on **sentence level** and focus on word choice:

1. Is your word choice accurate? Are you being **precise** and saying exactly what you mean? Are you being **concise**? Are there any areas where you could reduce the amount of words for better presentation and clarity? If you see word choice that needs to be edited, highlight them in **purple**.
2. Find areas where you use **passive voice**. How can you restructure the sentence to use **active voice** instead? Highlight passive voice in **pink**.
3. Do you **transition** between paragraphs smoothly? If not, highlight these areas in **grey**.

The goal of this assignment is to end up with a clear goal of revision. Your highlighted areas should show that you where to begin with your editing process on both a sentence and paragraph level. Submit your highlighted paper here, but keep a copy for yourself to use when you revise your paper for the Revision Project.

Figure 11.5. Revision assignment, TA 1.

## Editing (ER2)

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For this weeks assignment, read chapter 9 "Revision" (pg 107-117) and chapter 10 "Style" (pg. 121-130) in your textbook. This assignment will have two parts, a self-evaluation and a reverse outline. To receive credit, you must complete **both** parts of this assignment by Sunday (11/11).

**Part One:** For this week, you will look towards revising one of your major assignments. It would be the most beneficial to revise your Rhetorical Analysis assignment, since you already have a grade for this assignment. Remember, you are able to revise one of your major assignments to replace your original grade--so take revision seriously.

Answer the following questions about your paper using the strategies you read in your textbook:

- Review your **conclusion**. Are you merely summarizing what you've already stated? How can you connect your assertions in the larger scope of this conversation?
- Does your **thesis statement** cover all of your assertions in your body paragraphs? Do all of your topic sentences make a claim in support of your thesis? How can you revise your thesis to cover your entire argument?
- How can you make your sentences more **precise**? Are you being unnecessarily wordy? Can you simplify the meaning of your sentence? Does this sentence contribute to your claim/analysis in that particular paragraph?
- Pick a sentence that uses **passive voice**. How can you make changes in it to be in **active voice**?
- Examine each of your body **paragraphs**. Does your topic sentence make a clear claim in support of your thesis? Do you move between each idea using a transition word? Do you use evidence and then analyze and unpack that evidence? Do you use transitional phrases throughout each paragraph to help your reader seamlessly understand your point?

Figure 11.6. Revision assignment, TA 2.

## Reverse Outline (ER3)

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## Reverse Outline

You will be completing a reverse outline. Use the paper you will be revising for this. For this outline, use what you have written in your paper, not what you *should have* written. This will help you identify problem areas. A reverse outline identifies the elements of a piece of writing that is already written. In your reverse outline, highlight or underline each of the indicated elements in the correct colors. Be prepared to upload this as a word document or google doc:

- Looking through each sentence, highlight in **yellow** places in which you've used the passive voice
- Thesis: Highlight your Thesis in **blue**
- Main ideas: Highlight or underline each main idea used to support thesis in **green**
- Evidence: Highlight each piece of evidence that supports these main ideas in **purple**
- Audience: Highlight in **pink** all of the places where you write about the audience
- Transitions: Highlight each transition word or phrase in **red**

Once you have completed the reverse outline, write the following reflection: Overall, how well do you think your thesis was supported in this paper? How well did you follow the parameters of the assignment? According to your analysis of your writing, how strong are your claims? Respond in 250-300 words.

Figure 11.7. Revision assignment, TA 3.

With this in mind, we collaboratively examined our course navigation, technical expectations, decisions about where and how to submit work and how to offer consistent and transparent feedback, and worked to build in redundancies via multiple channels. We also knew that the best online instruction happens when teachers are engaged; when they demonstrate interaction and intervene at strategic times (Edwards et al., 2011); and when they succeed with motivation, self-discipline, communication, and commitment (English, 2014), so together we sought any and all opportunities to deliver, interact with, and design pedagogy that honored these findings.

To support the technical learning curve (as that is a major source of struggle for new OWI educators, by many measures), I had access to the TAs' Canvas course shells along the way and visited each shell before the Monday morning publishing deadline to review directions, check technical settings, and troubleshoot any other issues I could detect and advise on in advance.

### Benefits of Practicum+ Meetings

For our program, this Practicum+ model worked in expected, and even more unexpected, ways. We drew four primary advantages derived from the weekly meetings and the extensive post-semester interview with each OWI TA.

*OWI TAs increased discussions of effective teaching with technology as well as heightened discussions of multimodality, inclusivity, and access.*

For the OWI TAs, teaching online opened up the opportunity to think more critically about pedagogical design for all their TA cohort. Hewett and Warnock (2015) tell us that “OWI principles can be applied broadly to the motivation and the exigencies for composition writ large . . . beneficial for all modes of teaching” (p. 553). This Practicum+ model substantiated this claim dramatically. We saw this “writ large” motivation most clearly in the teaching demonstrations. We were all uncertain how the purely OWI demonstrations might go over with the other traditional TAs. In fact, when the OWI TAs presented to the whole cohort, they were timid and had mistakenly assumed the other teachers wouldn't be interested. What we all discovered, however, was that the opposite was true. The traditional TAs eagerly asked for the demonstration materials to be shared. They had thoughtful, engaging questions for the OWI TAs and requested more demonstrations of online teaching and learning. They all discussed, as a result of these OWI demonstrations, ways to move some class discussions/activities to online spaces (finding their own way to Jose Bowen's *Teaching Naked* [2012] assertions), new ways to guide more active digital reading, or ways to more effectively use online tools to help students recall course materials.

The OWI TAs found their OWI experience helpful to their future F2F pedagogical design as well. One OWI TA in this pilot Practicum+ model was an interesting case because she taught both F2F and online sections. She struggled with classroom management online, but she also saw more possibilities with her online as well as F2F classes *because* she taught online. For example, when asked what she'd do differently teaching this class next time around, she said, “I'd allow them to engage

in multimodal elements more so next time. All my students can demonstrate their understanding of rhetoric better using multimodal elements and using Canvas.” When I asked which class this response applied to, she hesitated, then admitted “both.” She felt like her new experience using technologies to do good pedagogical work illustrated a possibility to do better in every learning environment.

Having strictly OWI TAs in the practicum mix, in fact, encouraged the other nine TAs to critically engage issues of access (e.g., providing help videos for struggling students) and inclusivity (e.g., making a digital discussion forum for students who didn’t get a chance to speak up in class). Up to this point, these were not conversations that came up so organically (that is, unprompted) in prior traditional TA cohorts.

*The Practicum+ sessions both supported TAs through, and heightened our awareness of, the need for technical support.*

While the research calls for us to move beyond professional development that narrowly focuses on technical support for the LMS (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008), I found that technical uncertainties still dominated the concerns the OWI TAs brought to our weekly meetings. However, the issues weren’t primarily about technical ignorance; rather, they were concerns over how to make technology serve pedagogy. The TAs told us that they felt strongly supported by the dedicated time to talk through—with us and with each other—those concerns. These meetings were specific to their OWI experience and focused on what they needed most, in the moments when they needed it most, each and every week: collaboratively planning the weekly assignments, brainstorming how to use the technology thoughtfully, troubleshooting issues with student engagement, testing the limits of the LMS, practicing creative means of feedback, and reflecting on what moves worked best.

My having full access to the OWI TAs’ course shells and reviewing the settings and prompts before each module opened helped me to intervene on the numerous technical problems with the LMS before they became visible. Also, allowing the TAs access to one another’s course shells was deemed helpful, since they borrowed from one another and helped catch technical errors early. Sharing such pedagogical spaces can be challenging for many teachers; there is a tendency to be territorial with our classrooms—digital or F2F—and pedagogical design. To honor that, I was careful to check for technical concerns (e.g., consistent due dates, point values, submission directions, gradebook setup), not to critique prompts, response times, or grade distributions. This restraint helped foster a necessary trust in having me visit their course shell.

*OWI TAs showed an increased awareness and acceptance of OWI as rigorous and viable.*

These pilot OWI TAs are typical in that they entered this pilot program reflecting common attitudes toward OWI. In fact, two (of the three) expressed deep doubts that online environments were ever really conducive to learning. But by the end

of the Fall 2018 semester, after being immersed in OWI and supported through their own online-specific course-design processes, all three ended the semester with a strong feeling that OWI *can* work when designed thoughtfully, that it was a distinct boost to accessibility, and that OWI was overall a strong and viable mode of education.

*The Practicum+ meetings provided much-needed emotional support and a long-term view of the value of online education.*

This effort (and my work to support faculty through the COVID emergency transition) has brought another element of OWI training to my attention. The presence of an experienced mentor and a supportive cohort who can help guide the co-design process and troubleshoot issues is largely an emotional endeavor. As I reflect, I notice that much of what I have done is provide emotional support for the risk these new and new-to-online educators are taking on: sometimes playing with a new interface, sometimes smoothing over any mistakes, mostly calming the nerves that accompany new risks.

When taken altogether, these results of the Practicum+ model for supporting new OWI TAs proved effective. Having and supporting OWI TAs with a new Practicum+ model was not only a benefit to the online TAs but a benefit to *all* TAs—especially around multimodality, inclusivity, and accessibility—regardless of the classroom environment. Beyond that, however, this effort to weave OWI-specific scholarship and professional development proved beneficial to more than the TAs and their students. As a result of the Practicum+ model, our CU Denver English department and the field of rhetoric, composition, and writing studies now have a few new teachers mentored specifically in OWI. Further, a new precedent has been set for training new OWI TAs through informal grassroots means, not just to solve some problem of underprepared graduate students, but to honor OWI as “stimulating and nourishing learning spaces in their own right,” not the “impoverished replicas of traditional classroom spaces” (Cargile Cook, 2005, p. 65).

### Limitations of the Practicum+ Model

I acknowledge that this approach falls short of ideal and warrants ongoing reflection. In one final interview with the OWI TAs at the end of the Fall 2018 semester, I culled together tips for redesigning this program. While the three novice OWI instructors left feeling uncertain about the kinds of things all TAs wrestle with—the fairness of assessment, the value of written feedback, how to teach to such a disparate group of abilities—some of their concerns were specific to OWI, such as engaging and successfully interacting with struggling students who don’t respond to emails; balancing the text-heavy tendency of OWI course design with videos and audio links; and the steep learning curve of doing so with a focus tuned to accessibility, making better use of multimodal opportunities to engage learners,

and time management. These OWI TAs essentially echoed what Lisa Melonçon and Heidi Skurat Harris (2015) and Wanda Worley and Lee Tesdell (2009) warned us about: Online teaching requires an expansion of your own literacies, much as it does for students' literacies, and that means that OWI instructors' time and energy are heavily taxed as developing an online course takes an enormous amount of time and research. As one OWI TA put it, "Online is deceptive. You think you can do more than you can, faster than you can." The truth of this leaves WPAs to more carefully consider the tentative balance between allowing TAs to have pedagogical freedom and the pragmatic concerns of being a new teacher and supporting those concerns with the transcontextual theory they need—all while simultaneously offering the emotional and logistical support they might not yet know they need. I found the need for tuning into such a balance even more pronounced among OWI TAs.

Further, the issues of WPA labor are problematic. The design and implementation of the Practicum+ model was not stipended but should have been. I'd encourage other programs to make a better case for supporting the additional labor—both for the WPAs designing the OWI guide and hosting the weekly meetings (in the form of a stipend, service credit, or a course release) as well as the graduate TAs (in the form of an additional stipend or credit towards their degree).

## Conclusion and Takeaways

Ultimately, this pilot Practicum+ model<sup>5</sup> taught us the same lessons the field has learned from expanding into myriad threads of scholarship (e.g., disabilities studies, queer studies, multimodal studies): When we seek to learn about a new and seemingly different way to teach, we are all empowered to expand our tools for inclusivity. Now, with a Practicum+ program that makes room for OWI-specific pedagogies, values, and scholarly support, we can prepare teachers for the rigors of teaching via digital media, merged with the practical instantiation of the theories and best practices presented in the growing body of OWI research. That focus on OWI specifically improves teaching for us all, in every learning environment, and maximizes learning among our students.

I suspect I'll always feel nervous when I begin a new class, a new module, a new activity, whether online or F2F. But, after years of searching for a professional support network, I lean on the traditions of OWI scholarship that I can now see. I find that scholarship eases my mind, gives me a head start, and supports a focus

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5. In two subsequent years, this informal attempt to professionally develop new TAs in OWI had to shift to a Spring-semester series of informal weekly meetings, disconnected from the practicum. I continued to meet with new OWI TAs, concurrent with their first semester of online instruction, proving the model is portable, flexible, able to be applied to any semester where new TAs (or instructors new to OWI) can participate without designing a new course or re-arranging the graduate curriculum.

of online pedagogical design that rests firmly on rigor, support, and student-centric learning. I wish I'd seen that glimpse of a professional network sooner, but I hope efforts like this one (and so many others, in varied circumstances) help continue the good work.

For others looking to do something similar, tailored to their own local contexts, the key takeaways of the Practicum+ program are to collect key concerns among scholarship that meet their programmatic values (in an OWI guide, easily shared with all interested educators) and, more critically, designate an experienced (and enthusiastic) OWI educator to meet with new (and new-to-online) faculty each week for practical weekly discussion and collaborative design concurrent with their first OWI teaching experience.

The future will ideally involve more choice for both teachers and students who are free to determine the best learning environment for their needs. That same ideal future will offer all TAs the opportunity to try teaching (and learning) in varied classroom environments, if they choose, and be prepared and supported as they design F2F, asynchronous online, remote, hybrid, and HyFlex facilitation. Until that day, these informal efforts at professional development might be the best way forward for those of us who are slowly building a case for dedicated OWI TA training in their home departments.

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