



## Get Into Your Rhythm!

All golfers are part of a larger group or team, even though golf is actually an individual sport. Golfers have teams that include coaches, trainers, mentors, and their families, and these teams cheer them on, help them improve, and hold them up when they're feeling low or not playing well.

Writing program leaders need teams too. It's more productive and fun to work together and get an activity completed. Additionally, multiple perspectives usually always make the end product stronger.

What we like about Lourdes Fernandez et al.'s chapter is that they introduce this idea of collaboration in regards to hybrid online writing courses and research. We also like that this chapter is so focused on meeting the needs of instructors and supporting instructors in a continuous fashion as they teach online.

# Chapter 7. Research is a Team Sport: A Collaborative PARS Approach to Sustainable Hybrid and Online Writing Instruction Development

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**Abstract:** In this chapter, we demonstrate how the PARS (personal, accessible, responsive, and strategic) framework can be applied to collaborative research that is sustainable for all participants over the long term. By strategically selecting instructors whose interests in hybrid and online writing instruction (OWI) vary, developing a thoughtful timeline and research scope that allows participants to self-select tasks that they are most interested in, and creating feedback loops that are both iterative and multidirectional to respond to instructor needs, our team has been effective and prolific in its research. This chapter includes a thorough overview of our research team’s development and practice as well as recommendations and a timeline to help others create and sustain their own research team.

**Keywords:** research, collaboration, writing program administration, professional development, hybrid

In their book *Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic: Resources and Strategies for Online Writing Instructors*, Jessie Borgman and Casey McArdle (2019) use golf as an overarching metaphor to frame their approach for teaching writing online. Not only is the title an acronym (PARS) that plays upon the vocabulary of golf, but also the nature of the game itself serves as a useful analogy for what online writing instruction involves. We see the connection for sure. Though golf is technically an individual sport, most golfers will tell you that they’re in it as much for the social and collaborative aspects as they are for the personal challenge. Similarly, though the traditional image of an academic researcher may be a tweedy professor holed up alone in a musty office, we have found that academic research can be just as effective as a “team sport.” Collaborative research can keep faculty invested, help maintain manageable workloads, and support consistent progress.

In this chapter, we describe the work of a team of seven faculty and writing program administrators (WPAs)—the Hybrid Task Force—who in fall 2019 began addressing the needs of instructors teaching hybrid writing courses in a writing program at a mid-Atlantic R1 institution. Our program is large: about

100 faculty teaching around 9,000 students a year in approximately 450 sections. It supports four general education composition courses: a one-semester first-year-writing-intensive course, two different first-year-writing-intensive courses designed to support multilingual and international pathways students, and a 300-level advanced composition course.

Our institution first began offering hybrid writing courses in 2017, spurred in part by the need to offer students flexible learning options and in part by growing constraints on available classroom space. By 2019, the program offered around ten percent of its composition courses, mostly advanced composition, in the hybrid mode; however, the COVID-19 pandemic quickly led to a plethora of distance learning options, including various models of hybrid courses, which continue to be offered in the program. Needless to say, shifting from a fully face-to-face (F2F) model of instruction to a partial distance learning (DL) model between 2017 and 2019 and then to a fully DL model during the pandemic was a challenge, and we assume it was a bit like helping golfers learn to play virtual golf like a professional in just a couple months.

Though we didn't consciously set out to do it at the time, our task force has developed an effective and replicable model for OWI professional and course development. The original task force was a strategically selected group of instructors with a self-reported interest in OWI, but with varying levels of hybrid teaching experience. By working collaboratively and pairing more and less experienced faculty together, we effectively conducted secondary and primary research; shared findings internally and externally through workshops, conferences, and peer-reviewed papers; fostered internal faculty expertise beyond the original members of the task force; and extended into the external sharing of resources outside our institution. This approach mirrors a community of practice (CoP) model that Lydia Hilliard (2021) discusses, which is evidenced-based, sensitive to local need, implementable with limited funding, and concerned with keeping faculty workloads in mind (Adams Wooten et al., 2022).

To better understand our approach, it might be useful to think of a biological feedback loop. As the task force shared original findings with fellow instructors, colleagues integrated these takeaways into their own teaching practices. Over time, they built on and complicated the original findings through feedback and additional research, which was in turn reintegrated into the task force's work. In this way, we avoided a rigid, top-down approach to knowledge-building and instead adapted the Borgman and McArdle (2019) PARS framework, recognizing that all faculty are members of the professional community and respecting their contributions to the conversation.

In the following sections, we provide a plan and research timeline that can help programs interested in a similar approach sustainably collect data, develop teaching resources, refine training and workshops, create new online and hybrid materials, and adapt existing course design approaches through the collaborative research model.

## Theory and Practice

### Our Task Force Team: A Framework for Sustainable Collaboration

The composition program established the hybrid task force with the main charges of gathering existing scholarship relevant to writing-intensive hybrid courses, developing teaching resources, and supporting faculty teaching hybrids in the program. Faculty teaching hybrid courses, particularly before the pandemic, were assigned them for a variety of reasons, including classroom availability and scheduling issues, and faculty teaching hybrids sometimes had training and experience and sometimes did not. In our program (before the pandemic), hybrids were taught with one in-person meeting a week and the rest of the material delivered asynchronously online. Since the pandemic, hybrid courses are also taught virtually, with one class meeting per week via Zoom and the rest of the work completed asynchronously, as well as hybrid synchronously, with one in-person session in a classroom and one via Zoom. The program also offers fully synchronous courses, where both weekly meetings are in-person via Zoom. While in 2019 the focus was understanding and supporting the hybrid, in-person course, the task force has developed materials that support all multimodal courses now offered.

To convene the task force, the program recruited writing faculty who were interested in learning more about hybrids or had experience teaching hybrid and/or online courses. As part of a quality enhancement plan (QEP) at the time, the program had access to funding to support undergraduate research, which included how to teach undergraduate research in our advanced composition courses, in particular through hybrid course design. This funding, which was only available until summer 2020, and that we augmented through our much smaller program budget through spring 2021, allowed the program to support the initial activities of the task force, providing a stipend to each faculty member.

During fall 2019, the team gathered scholarship and wrote a literature review, developed teaching resources for our internal website, and decided to formalize a research study to fill in gaps in hybrid writing pedagogy research. The team developed the institutional review board (IRB) protocol with survey and interview questions, and we decided to conduct the study in spring 2020, so we focused on securing funding for data coding in the summer. A central consideration was our ability to feel like the work was fair and sustainable, since the pay would not really cover all of the work involved. We conducted interviews with 14 faculty in spring 2020 as the pandemic was just beginning.

In the years since, we have collaboratively and iteratively worked to develop resources, analyze data, publish and present on the data, develop training and workshops based on the data, and make recommendations to the program on how to develop faculty expertise. We have also secured external grant funding

to conduct a second study, this time focused on student experiences of hybrid courses. That study will follow a similar timeline as the original study.

The task force itself has remained stable, and the work has been sustainable, despite the lack of funding in the last two years of the work. The task force has become a site of mentoring and professional development for its members. Below, we describe the concrete steps we took to recruit and to establish sustainable participation in the task force; we also include our advice on how to coordinate a task force of this kind and a project timeline. The collaborative model used has allowed for flexibility, versatility, and agency that other groups of faculty could use as a sustainable model. An important consideration is the research timeline, particularly when funding, time, and workloads constrain faculty participation. Over time, our team's research timeline remained sensitive to those constraints. Table 7.1 shows our research timeline and the activities the team has conducted since 2019.

**Table 7.1. Research Timeline**

Semester and Year	Research Activities Conducted
Summer 2019	Develop goals and a schedule for the task force. Invite select faculty with experience for the task force.
Fall 2019	Members of the task force conduct a review of the literature, craft a research report with short- and long-term recommendations for the program and institution, and create teaching resources to be shared with faculty in the program.
Spring 2020	Draft first research protocol and submit for IRB approval. Conduct surveys and follow-up interviews.
Summer and Fall 2020	Code interviews and discuss findings. Outline potential academic papers based on findings. Begin drafting articles.
2021	Continue drafting and revising articles after submission. Apply for continued funding.
2022	Publish articles. Develop schedule for phase two of research. Draft second research protocol and submit for IRB approval. Create public-facing website with teaching resources.
Ongoing activities 2021-2022	Present at local and national conferences. Draft curricular teaching resources. Revise teaching resources based on new research. Facilitate departmental workshops.

## Starting the Team: Recruit and Develop Faculty Expertise

An essential component of building a team is to strategically recruit faculty who can grow in a variety of ways and faculty who need or want different experiences so that their contributions are complementary and change over time. Building on the idea from PARS that personal administration involves respecting faculty and recognizing that they are members of the professional community, the team pulled in a variety of faculty members with different stakes in hybrid teaching, including non-tenure track (NTT) faculty and graduate teaching assistants (GTAs). Members of the team would meet regularly and choose which aspects of the project they were most interested in developing, including teaching resources, programmatic resources, pedagogical workshops, conference presentations, peer-reviewed articles, and grant applications. In brainstorming sessions and email threads, the team discussed priorities and project preferences, and team members would choose what they wanted to do. If there were not enough team members interested in pursuing a grant or submitting a proposal for a conference, then the team did not pursue that opportunity. For more manageable tasks, some members of the team would collaborate, while others would join at a different juncture, or not at all. Those with shared interests worked together on projects, and the decision-making process on what opportunities to pursue developed organically through discussion.

During the recruitment process, we invited faculty with a wide range of experiences and motivations to participate. We wanted faculty with experience teaching hybrids, but we also wanted faculty interested in developing expertise in hybrids. Additionally, we wanted to provide development opportunities for graduate students in the program. Faculty members chose to join for varied reasons, including to learn more about hybrids, to extend their expertise with online courses, to deepen their experience with qualitative research and managing research projects, and to extend their research interests in online teaching and disability studies scholarship.

The original members of the task force did not include the WPA, who is the only tenure track (TT) faculty member in the program. The task force received support from the program and supported program initiatives, and the director provided the space for task force members to do the work independently and at their own pace. An assistant director in the program, who was full-time NTT faculty, took on the coordination role, focusing on the logistics of facilitating, rather than overseeing, the work. This facilitated, delegated model has been essential to the collaborative process and has enabled a high degree of iteration.

## Sustaining the Team: Strategic Collaboration and Iteration

Making sure the process is iterative and flexible is essential when funding is scarce and workloads are high. One way the task force engaged faculty expertise was by

creating mechanisms where faculty could do more or less work depending on their interests, time, and expectations. Faculty could also work in pairs or alone and fold into larger group discussions as desired. Here are two examples of how this dynamic has developed:

- One faculty with creative writing and digital design experience is not as interested in the research components of the study (coding data, analyzing data, publishing in peer-reviewed journals). This faculty is interested in the teaching resources piece, so they participate more intensely when the work is related to design and implementation of teaching resources and the creation of workshops for the program. The instructor has contributed incredible teaching resources, conducted workshops, and coined the term *braiding*, which has helped us frame the findings from the study. In the next iteration of the study, the faculty will work more closely with the data but still decide when and how to contribute.
- One faculty with a background in creative writing and linguistics originally focused on teaching resources and workshops but has also become increasingly embedded in the research studies. To develop methods expertise, they were paired with someone with coding experience during the initial data coding portion of the study and learned how to develop code-books, settle on themes, and write analysis. At the same time, as peer-reviewed articles were being written, the faculty moved from support for the first two articles to lead writer of the third article. The process has been intensively iterative, flexible, and collaborative, modeled on development and mentorship.

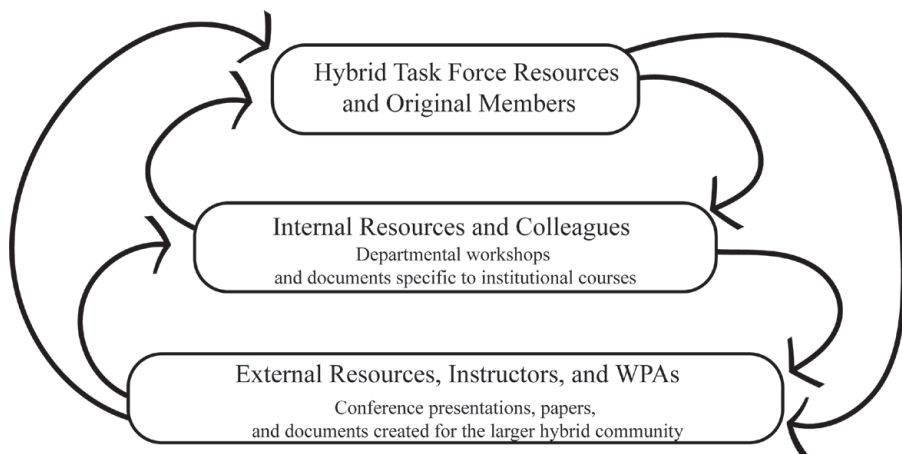
In order to facilitate sustained, collaborative faculty engagement, we have focused on cultivating fluid team dynamics that support different branches of work. One coordinator manages logistics and the timeline using a facilitated model that allows for different entry points into the work. The coordinator manages the back-end logistics, including sending reminders about timelines and opportunities, but does not manage all aspects of the research, writing, and resource and training development process. This approach allows for other faculty to lead portions of the work as desired or needed and gives the coordinator the space needed to help the task force stay on track without directly managing it.

This coordinator approach was only possible because the director of the program joined the work when the first round of peer-reviewed publications was beginning and after initial data analysis had been completed. The director has been thoughtful about how to engage as a member of the task force without replicating the hierarchical structures that her role would imply. That collaborative, delegated leadership model has ensured faculty can work without feeling they are working directly for the director while still seeing the work as supporting the program.



## Motivating the Team: From Strategic Iteration to Strategic Versatility

To understand the work of the task force over the last three years, as suggested previously, it is helpful to visualize the work as a biological feedback loop, interconnected and engaged in multiple, simultaneous processes. While the initial research study and initial resource development were completed by members of the task force, members of the task force have at different points networked with other faculty, shared resources formally through workshops and training sessions as well as informally through casual interactions and conversations, and brought back the feedback to the work of the task force. Simultaneously, task force members have continuously incorporated findings from the data, revisions from peer-reviewed articles, and feedback from conference presentations into the aims and work of the task force. Figure 7.1 shows these feedback loops.



*Figure 7.1. Iterative research and feedback process (image created by Ariel M. Goldenthal).*

Accessible administration, according to PARS, involves listening to and supporting faculty, including with students and technical support. Throughout the team's work, we have used data to reshape the frequency and format of faculty professional development, to revise the program-developed online templates, and to make better course design and scheduling decisions. Because of the complicated nature of teaching hybrid courses, our team began its work wanting to know more about how faculty experience these courses and how our program could better support faculty who teach them. Our group found that feedback strategies in hybrid courses change in small but important ways, and we have begun rethinking how students access feedback and how faculty can make feedback more visible for students in LMSs (Goldenthal et al., 2022). Our team also developed resources about how to “braid” together the online and face-to-face components of hybrid courses that help faculty scaffold and support students'



learning experiences in hybrid courses (see publicly available resources at <https://hybridtl.org>).

The pandemic accelerated this process of branched iteration, and the task force has become increasingly versatile in how it synthesizes new feedback and develops new material and interventions. PARS discusses responsive administration in several ways, including supporting faculty without exploiting them and supporting faculty and program needs broadly. We convened our team in response to faculty and student needs as our program increased the number of hybrid courses offered without explicitly supporting faculty through programmatic or institutional professional development. The pandemic changed the scope of the task force's work and made some of the work more urgent. As we were conducting interviews, the university went fully online in March 2020. Suddenly, the faculty who we were interviewing to learn more about how they teach hybrids were teaching fully online, often keeping the hybrid model but with a virtual, synchronous weekly meeting. The protocol we had designed asked faculty to speak of hybrids generally, but the pandemic inflected some of the responses with this pivot. As a result, we had data showing how faculty adapt to online environments in a crisis; how they use prior knowledge, current expertise, and peer-to-peer networks to adapt; and how workloads impact access to training and professional development.

From slow iteration, we moved to multidirectional response, both to address immediate concerns and to develop durable teaching resources that would support multimodal teaching that uses different elements of hybrids and online technologies. During the second and third year of the project, as the pandemic created new exigencies, the task force developed several initiatives to respond to short-term and long-term issues. As we analyzed data, we used some of the findings to immediately develop workshops focused on workload-aware feedback strategies and on strategies to provide explicit transitions to students enrolled in hybrid courses. The team also continued to analyze the data to support requests for additional support for courses and to prepare for conferences and peer-reviewed articles. The multiple directions of the task force allowed members options to share their knowledge and expertise and the chance to try new things (e.g., writing an academic paper, analyzing interview data) while developing materials and training to better support and respond to faculty needs as the pandemic progressed and the program offered additional course delivery methods, including virtual hybrid and synchronous online courses.

As feedback from multiple sources has been folded into the work, and as data has been used recursively to aid decision-making and to develop faculty mentoring roles, new areas of concern have also developed. The data, feedback from training and workshops, and response from the program have opened conversations about the role of access in hybrid writing courses. Access originally meant how faculty accessed resources easily, but the conversation now includes student access to learning in hybrid modalities, including multilingual students and

students with disability accommodations. The pandemic created a pivot towards more variations of our traditional hybrid modality, which further accelerated this conversation. One main result of these multidirectional feedback loops is that we are beginning to center accessibility throughout other program initiatives and conversations. This feedback loop now informs the second stage of the research study, which will focus on student experiences in hybrids. The survey and interview protocols will include questions about accessibility and inclusion, and students will be asked to describe their experiences using technology; accessing and implementing feedback; and engaging with the space, time, and place differences in the hybrid modality.

## Conclusion and Takeaways

### Building Your Own Team

Given our group's experiences building a collaborative and sustainable research and teaching model, in Table 7.2 we offer some lessons learned that others can take up in developing similar approaches to building collective knowledge about online writing instruction (or other changes in a writing program).

**Table 7.2. Lessons for Developing Collective Knowledge About OWI**

Lesson Learned	Discussion
Have a basic and flexible strategic plan in place.	Determine what members want out of the group (e.g., experience with academic collaboration, teaching resources they and others can use) and what they want to create (e.g., teaching resources, journal articles, presentations). These can then be scaffolded into a timeline, and different clusters of group members can participate as they want. The plan should be flexible enough to evolve over time and to reflect a collaborative approach to goal setting.
Use a pilot to launch new initiatives and task forces.	Constrain the work, work closely with a small team, and figure out resources, including funding, time, and support for sustainable workflow, before scaling the work. Allow for slow uptake of the work throughout the program, as faculty working in the pilot can then become part of training teams.
Assemble a small group of faculty already doing or interested in exploring the same idea to make launching an initiative focused and sustainable.	Scope work to be tightly constrained and framed around a smaller goal to support development of expertise and to promote careful expansion that keeps in mind workloads.

Lesson Learned	Discussion
Be intentional about group size.	The group has to be big enough to allow for members to step in and out of tasks they care about within the larger project. The group should have faculty with overlapping strengths but with enough room for individual professional development.
Consider individual expertise and how it matters in the context of collaboration.	Although starting with common interest in hybrids and different areas of expertise, as the team has collaborated, new expertise has developed, individual contributions have changed, and some redundancy of expertise has been built. This, in turn, has changed who leads a task, who steps out, etc.
Pair faculty strategically to build expertise and group cohesion.	Pairing more experienced group members with less experienced group members on particular tasks builds mentorship into the group and allows opportunities for group members to develop as teachers, researchers, and program leaders. This can take more time than assigning members to tasks they already know how to do, but it is an integral part of the group's development.
Develop work slowly and commit to collaboration.	Allow time for activities such as thinking, processing, and listening that Laura Micciche (2011) argues can build "slow agency." Unless an external exigence demands speedy work, a workflow that accounts for group members' schedules and evolves around these will make collaborative efforts most sustainable over time, even if it does mean changes based on the work are slower in developing across a writing program.
Use a fluid, facilitated coordination model.	Allow for group collaboration and collaboratively-developed goals. The work should never exceed what the team is willing to do at any given time, and this commitment to collaboration requires a facilitated, rather than a directive, coordination style. If a WPA is involved in the group, consider whether they are the best person to lead the group.
Build a sustainable research timeline to help manage expectations and workload.	To prioritize collaboration, research should be sensitive to workload. Different types of work can be completed at different times, with periods of intense, focused work and periods of very little research-related work. For instance, research tasks such as data collection can be interspersed with workshops and training that are informed by ongoing, partial data analysis.
Be flexible with available funding.	If funding is available, then it should also be strategic. Rather than tying funding to group members doing work overall, funding can be tied to what people want to do and contribute. This supports group members who want to say no to some tasks, while still supporting those who are doing particular tasks that support the writing program as a whole.
Build faculty expertise iteratively across the program.	As the group gains expertise and builds knowledge, leverage this new expertise to iteratively build faculty expertise across the program. With our group, this involved group members facilitating workshops and sharing resources that other faculty then learned from and began modifying on their own.

Although academic research is often framed as a solitary endeavor, we have found that approaching it as a team sport has allowed for our group to gain individual and collective skills and knowledge that have led to further growth in hybrid pedagogies across our program. The lessons we learned can serve as a game plan for others who want to design and implement a collaborative research task force of their own. We see two major takeaways from these lessons: 1) Use a model that allows research and analysis to expand by branching rather than moving linearly from the top down to cultivate a creative environment for faculty inquiry, and 2) give each team member the freedom to dive deeply into the position they “play” because it strengthens the collective expertise of the team overall.

Adapting this type of model can be useful in many different settings, where the team assembled can define their own goals and how to collaboratively work towards them. With an area of research such as hybrid writing pedagogies, where the scholarship in the field is less-developed, this type of model also provides a pathway for cyclical knowledge-building from scholarship, from a group’s own research, and from the development of resources that can be both internally and externally shared and further extended. As new innovations and pedagogical strategies emerge in online writing instruction (for instance, through HyFlex instructional modalities), building collaborative and recursive research groups in and between institutions will be an important part of our field’s developing further knowledge of how to best support students and faculty who teach and learn in online spaces. This model offers one flexible approach that can help the field accomplish this work in sustainable ways.

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## Appendix: Suggested Readings

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