



Startup Multiliteracy Centers and Faculty Collaboration on Multimodal Pedagogy

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Writing centers have long been concerned with their shifting institutional identities and the implication of what Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford call “refiguration of institutional space” (33): for writing centers, this “refiguration” consists of how students, faculty, staff, and other campus stakeholders view the material and symbolic value of writing center services, programming, and place at a college or university (Ede and Lunsford; Lerner; Lunsford and Ede). The transformation of a writing center to a multiliteracy center (that is, a center that provides support for written as well as non-written text and other communicative arts) usually entails major shifts in all of these categories. Understanding how writing centers can transition into multiliteracy centers may be even more pressing as more writing centers can be expected to assist with multimodal assignments in the future. According to a 2014 survey of writing centers at four-year institutions conducted by the National Census of Writing, 52% (317 out of 605 writing centers) provide support for oral presentations and 25% provide help with new media (Gladstein and Fralix). The survey results support Meghan Roe’s findings that increasing numbers of writing centers (70% of those surveyed) are supporting multimodal texts. According to Roe, future writing centers must prepare to be multiliteracy centers: “writing centers need to be responding to multimodal composing and even actively promoting it on campus, and one way to accomplish this goal is through finding partners for collaboration” (48). Collaboration is not only a method to promote the services of a multiliteracy center, but also a vital means for fostering multimodal education on campus.



While the topic of understanding multimodal writing in the context of multiliteracy centers has received attention in recent years in writing center scholarship (Balester et al.; Carpenter and Apostel; Carpenter and Lee; Sheridan and Inman), there is little discussion

about what ways these centers began or how multiliteracy centers embed their programs into campus culture through collaboration. This article relates how, by focusing on faculty collaboration, two multiliteracy centers, one at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) and the other at California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI), employed strategies that include consulting on the curricular design of multimodal texts. To be sure, traditional writing centers have outreach practices involving faculty collaborations much like multiliteracy centers through department pitches, conversations with individual faculty, and tailored workshops. In comparing notes, though, we have found that both our multiliteracy centers implemented similar collaborative (or what we call “faculty-facing”) strategies during the first year of operation that deliberately aimed to increase faculty’s pedagogical engagement in multimodal composition. In the ensuing pages, we draw a connection between Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) collaboration theory and our faculty-facing programs, and discuss three key strategies that have been crucial for us in launching our multiliteracy centers: seeking partnerships with university departments that integrate multimodal projects into their curriculum, providing faculty consultations on existing assignments, and designing center programs that increase faculty engagement.

INSTITUTIONAL HISTORIES OF EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY AND CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY CHANNEL ISLANDS MULTILITERACY CENTERS

At EKU, a public institution of over 16,000 students, many of whom are first generation, the University Writing Center had an established presence on campus with a tenured director from English for much of its time. The writing center’s services focused on one-to-one consultations for print-based writing. In addition, the institution aimed to integrate workshops and faculty development that support multimodal writing with writing and research in one space within the library, which was the hub of academic activity on campus. With an endowment from the Noel family, the new multiliteracy center was named the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity and hired Russell Carpenter, who reports to the Dean of the Library and is a tenured faculty member in English. Construction began in Fall 2009 and the Noel Studio opened in October 2010. Seeing the need for integrated writing, communication, research, and multimodal composition support, EKU designed the Noel Studio with large, open spaces and smaller spaces that reflect the phases of the writing and communication process (Bunnell et al.).

CSUCI is a Hispanic-Serving Institution in the California State University (CSU) system, drawing about 7,000 students, primarily

from Ventura county in southern California. A majority of CSUCI students self-identify as first generation. During its founding year in 2002, the University Writing Center was housed in the English Program but was subsequently moved under the College of Arts and Sciences and was directed by non-tenure track English faculty. In 2015, the center was restructured once more under the library academic unit with a new tenure-track, assistant professor and Faculty Director Sohui Lee and a new name: Writing & Multiliteracy Center (WMC) with Sohui reporting to the Dean of the Library. Unlike the Noel Studio, the WMC does not have an endowment and relies on a renewable grant drawn from student fees every year for the majority of its budget. Nonetheless, with the support of the Dean of the Library, the WMC adapted their existing space by purchasing needed technology and tools and annexing a library room for videotaping, presentations, and recording. By 2017, just two years into its transformation as a multiliteracy center, about 10% of all tutoring involved oral, visual, or multimodal consultations, and 60% of workshop requests from faculty were multiliteracy workshops.

EKU's Noel Studio and CSUCI's Writing & Multiliteracy Center share several commonalities as startup multiliteracy centers that made it easier for the directors to explore faculty collaboration on multimodal pedagogy. First, the two campuses did not have existing communication centers that offered student support for public speaking, presentations, or slideshow design. Therefore, faculty and administrators on our campuses did not have preconceived notions about oral communication or a legacy of administrators or programming in this area. The campuses also lacked robust faculty development programs, particularly in supporting faculty who design oral, visual, or multimedia assignments. This gap in communication tutoring and faculty development support for multimodal projects provided a significant opening for our multiliteracy centers. Finally, both directors have expertise in multimodal composition: Russell researched multimodal composition as a graduate student; Sohui taught multimodal composition courses for seven years and set up a digital media consultant program in her previous institution. Because both understood the nature of the pedagogical challenges related to multiliteracy, they were able to immediately develop workshops for faculty and students as well as train tutors directly.

MYTH OF TRANSCIENCE AND NEED FOR FACULTY COLLABORATION

While not all writing centers have a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) or Writing in the Disciplines (WID) mission, some key concepts of thinking about cross-curricular writing, such as those introduced by David R. Russell, have been echoed in the writing of

scholars such as Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, and Carol Severino and Megan Knight, who advocate for writing centers' collaborative relationships with faculty. In 1990, Russell's expansive history of WAC highlighted an important criticism of WAC programs: that WAC programs "perpetuate the myth of transience, the convenient illusion that some new program will cure poor student writing, that there is a single pedagogical solution to complex structure issues" tied to curricular, institutional policies of universities (66). Russell recommended that WAC programs distribute the responsibility for teaching writing among all faculty and avoid designating the purview of writing pedagogy solely to faculty teaching writing intensive courses, composition courses, or even to writing centers. Suggestions like Russell's shaped how WAC/WID programs work collaboratively with faculty to support this type of distributive, cross-curricular writing effort. Ede and Lunsford have also insisted that writing centers should not present themselves as the sole experts of writing knowledge but instead as centers that facilitate how writing knowledge is created in collaboration. Indeed, Severino and Knight, working at the University of Iowa, presented the essence of Ede and Lunsford's argument when they envisioned their university functioning like a writing center and emphasized re-distributing the responsibility of teaching writing. These approaches to collaborations shaped how we programmed multimodal education in our multiliteracy centers: faculty collaboration is at the heart of all "faculty-facing programs"—programs that not only involve faculty outreach but also consciously integrate faculty collaboration to spread multiliteracy pedagogy.

FACULTY-FACING STRATEGIES

At EKU and CSUCI, the WAC approach to writing pedagogy critically helped our centers launch our multiliteracy center startups. Thinking programmatically about the stakeholders at our institutions, we understood faculty as essential players in developing a culture of multimodal writing that included teaching and learning practices across campus. Faculty who volunteered to collaborate became more invested in teaching multimodal texts because they were given on-going support in designing and assessing assignments as well as in providing students effective feedback.

During our first years as multiliteracy centers, the Noel Studio and the WMC applied three faculty-facing strategies that helped bolster our collaborative work with faculty.

Using faculty consultations and workshops to improve existing multimodal assignments

Faculty often have multimodal assignments they struggle with or are interested in enhancing. Collaborative relationships developed

through workshops and faculty consultations on both campuses allowed for input and involvement in shaping ongoing development of multimodal assignments and led to deeper faculty engagement. In the Noel Studio, Russell used department and individual faculty meetings to promote opportunities for collaboration on assignment design and structure by enhancing existing projects, assignments, and ways feedback is delivered to students. During these meetings, most faculty expressed interest in public speaking and presentation assignments. In many departments, though, faculty expressed interest in ePortfolios. These individual meetings often led to ongoing collaborations on assignments or rubrics. The most significant challenge during this time was assessing the effectiveness of the redesigned materials. In most cases, Russell and the faculty member decided on an assessment plan that allowed both sides to understand how the assignments enhanced student learning about the communication process. For example, collaborating with faculty in the College of Education led to redesigned ePortfolio assignments with a focus on the writing, speaking, and design process not emphasized previously. Russell delivered workshops and provided individual consultations on ePortfolio organization and design to help faculty incorporate revisions into syllabi; consequently, faculty were introduced to the value of process-oriented approaches.

During her first year at the WMC, Sohui also introduced the multiliteracy center at every department meeting across the university, but the most important outreach occurred through one-to-one faculty consultations. Being part of the library academic unit, the WMC was introduced in the existing library workshop request form delivered to all CSUCI faculty at the start of the semester; faculty were asked to check a box if they might be interested in learning more about the WMC. Resulting meetings with faculty allowed her to clarify any misunderstanding about the center's "multiliteracy" work and discuss the design of existing assignments. Most faculty began with sharing their slideshow presentation or video assignments; then discussions led to rewriting rubrics or scaffolding major assignments with explicit discussions on strategies in class. For Sohui, the biggest challenge was supporting the many workshop requests generated by faculty since no existing instructional expert or tutor in multimodal communication was available. She hired and trained special consultants (faculty in the composition program) to assist in leading workshops. By the following year, she hired a full-time lecturer as Assistant Director.

Actively identifying, assessing, and engaging with university programs requiring multiliteracy support

In addition to supporting popular assignments, the Noel

Studio and the WMC targeted departments and programs that required multiliteracy support, which led to continued program enhancement. Russell began by evaluating programs that were already doing presentations and slide design and reached out to EKU's Honors program, which sought to enhance presentation and slide design among their students. Russell worked with the program director to coordinate opportunities for enhanced multiliteracy support during milestones throughout the academic year. In addition, Russell and the director established dates during the semester by which students would be best served by designing and working in the Noel Studio on presentations, slideshows, or processes related to these projects. The Noel Studio's collaboration with Honors has expanded to include weekly workshops for junior- and senior-level students.

During the first year of directing a multiliteracy center, Sohui also identified existing programs that might need presentation support and actively targeted the programs rather than waiting for requests for help. For instance, the WMC was not initially involved with supporting the Student Research Center, which recruited and supported ten CSUCI student candidates who applied to compete in the statewide California State University Research Competition involving all 23 campuses. Students in the Research Competition submit a five-page abstract of their university research project and deliver a ten-minute presentation. However, Sohui had extensive experience in teaching oral presentations and pitches, and she attended public presentation rehearsals for the competition to provide feedback to students as part of the audience. Her feedback caught the attention of the Student Research Center Director, and she was invited to work with the center to support the next cohort. Like Russell, Sohui also established deadlines with the Student Research Center Director to schedule revision of abstracts and rehearsals of slideshow presentations. WMC's collaboration with the center extended to supporting other programs such as Summer Undergraduate Research Fellows and reshaped how top CSUCI students were prepared to communicate research by scaffolding multimodal composing processes.

Designing programs for faculty development in teaching multimodal composition

Both Noel Studio and the WMC designed programs for faculty development to improve the teaching of multimodal composition. For instance, the Noel Studio began its first semester of operation by offering drop-in faculty development workshops. These workshops allowed faculty participants to share approaches, learn from one another, ask questions, and rethink grading and assessment

practices. Two challenges Russell faced in coordinating these workshops were inconsistent attendance and tailoring content to ensure interactivity. Therefore, Russell implemented important adjustments to the process. Faculty members now register for workshops through an online form available on the Noel Studio website. Confirmation emails, along with workshop tools, readings, or resources, are sent in advance. Noel Studio staff members also customize workshops to focus on faculty or department need (e.g. integrating collaborative writing technologies into the classroom and visual rhetoric), while also designing opportunities for interaction among participants. Staff members work closely with faculty or departments to design and implement workshops, and participants have the opportunity to learn techniques collaboratively. Ideally, these strategies are then implemented in classes taught by EKU faculty members.

At the WMC, Sohui provided faculty development on multimodal pedagogy by offering embedded tutor support for upper-division “communication intensive” courses that involved multiple writing and oral/multimodal assignments. The Embedded Multiliteracy Tutor program required interested faculty from across all disciplines to meet with Sohui to collaboratively design the tutor’s itinerary of involvement with the course. Faculty also worked with Sohui to revise written and multimodal assignments to improve the course for the next semester. In working with the embedded tutors, students have begun to identify connections between writing and presenting as well as being mindful of how these modalities prioritize different communication approaches and strategies. In addition to being helpful to students, the Embedded Multiliteracy Tutor program has been valuable to faculty, giving them opportunities to explore other multimodal assignments they haven’t considered before. The growth and success of the program, however, led to a challenge of sustainability in terms of Sohui’s own time and program funding. Currently, Sohui applies for a temporary university grant every semester to hire a part-time Embedded Multiliteracy Tutor Coordinator, but she still meets individually with all faculty involved with the program.

CONCLUSION

Although there are many ways startup multiliteracy centers can establish themselves, faculty collaborations have provided fertile soil in which our multiliteracy centers were able to plant seeds for multimodal teaching and learning. For writing centers that wish to expand their work with multimodal assignment tutorials, faculty-facing programs may be an essential strategy for raising awareness and developing a campus culture supporting the ways

students communicate in the 21st century. Beyond getting faculty across disciplines to appreciate and be involved in multimodal pedagogy, faculty-facing programs led by multiliteracy and writing centers may deepen students' experiences and understanding of multimodal composing by exposing students to multiple composing opportunities throughout their time at the university.



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