Write On! A Model for Enhancing Faculty Publication

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This case study presents the rationale and context for a one-year campus-wide writing program designed to raise the confidence and productivity of campus faculty and professional staff members. The program is analyzed in terms of a discussion of overall faculty development, and leadership models (e.g., illustrating how senior faculty could actively assist junior faculty to envision and invest in a professional research and writing agenda). Interviews with program participants illustrate how the program helped participants to increase their scholarly output, concurrent with other campus and personal commitments. The paper concludes with a discussion of overall benefits of a campus-wide writing program that seeks to involve participants from all parts of the campus.

Academic writing ability is presumed prerequisite to obtaining academic employment. Arguably, most faculty and professional staff (whose current and potential positions increasingly require published writing) have obtained advanced degrees based mainly, if not entirely, on written products. Yet Boice has observed that “novice professors start out woefully under-prepared” to meet the demands of writing and publication. In addition, others working within academic environments may lack a full awareness of the range of responsibilities that require writing and the level to which they are expected to produce and publish text (Boice, 1995, 16).

Consequently, many faculty, both new and seasoned, disclose the need to develop strategies to deal with the challenges of academic writing for publication.

The stalled productivity of less experienced academic writers can jeopardize careers. This has been confirmed in recent studies of requirements for tenure: “most departments demand more published research...some institutions even accelerate the whole process, sizing up young scholars, ...showing them the door if it looks as if they won’t eventually measure up” (Wilson, 2001, p A12).

This paper explores the benefits of the faculty writing support-group approach used at an urban comprehensive college. We look particularly at the program design and outcomes within the framework of institutional support structures and faculty development programs.
Campus-wide Leadership in Relation to Writing Productivity

One of the goals of the program was to encourage senior faculty in the program to use strategies and techniques for leadership. In many of our institutional environments, one element of success for junior faculty includes the development of a personal vision to guide their professional career trajectory. Peter Senge introduced the notion of an effective mental model, and the co-requisites of "shared vision" and "personal vision," with this rationale:

Organizations intent on building shared visions continually encourage members to develop their personal visions. If people don't have their own vision, all they can do is 'sign up' for someone else's. The result is compliance, never commitment. On the other hand, people with a strong sense of personal direction can join together to create a powerful synergy toward what I/we truly want. (p. 211)

The extent to which leaders seek out opportunities to mentor junior faculty around the issue of academic writing can be directly proportional to the success of the effort. Rather than relying on a traditional department-based expectation for publication, with homogenous solutions to writing difficulties, our approach was to assist campus leaders in utilizing a supportive, heterogeneous model, within which both a new shared vision and personal visions could be fostered.

Institutional Context and a Faculty Development Model

Faculty are highly influenced by the context within which they operate, and by the priorities they observe to be valued. This context is based in part on institutional type (e.g., Research I institutions vs comprehensive colleges, valuing of teaching over scholarship or vice versa), as well as on the professional field/discipline or department.

Key to understanding a context is locating support within it. In higher education institutional settings, faculty development programs typically offer (at least) three potential resources: [1] professional development opportunities, [2] support networks and, [3] personal management training. The relative value of these resources for the individual may vary depending on the location of the individual on a tenure timeline, the capabilities of the individual in managing time and organization, and the accessibility of support networks. In some cases, the faculty and professional staff members involved may seek out and use one resource to the exclusion of others.

It would seem that most academics could rely on their institution to provide these basic resources through a faculty development program. Yet, a challenge many department chairs and deans can face when trying to support or encourage faculty writing is that of propinquity: people generally use convenient resources. In many cases, institutional support for scholarship may be limited to admonitions, or words of encouragement. While many institutions have stated goals of providing structured support to faculty and staff with regard to developing teaching materials and conference presentations, many individuals find they must seek out support and resources to enhance specific goals, such as publication, on their own. A type of support that can, on some campuses, include support for research and publication, is included as part of a campus-wide faculty development program. This type of support has expanded in recent years on many campuses and is called either a faculty development center, teaching excellence center, or, as it is called at some colleges, a Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT). According to Bergquist and Phillips (1981), who outlined some of the tenets that led to the development of teaching and learning centers across the country, "'Faculty Development' rightly seen is the proper development of the individual faculty member, and that is primarily a function of integrity—professional, societal, personal." More currently (2001), the Professional and Organizational Development Network (POD) identifies three aspects of faculty development: the faculty member as a teacher, the faculty member as a scholar and professional, and the faculty member as a person.

A recent compilation of the 27 major developments that have changed teaching and learning in higher education over the past 30 years includes the "emergence of faculty development and establish-
ment of support programs and centers” (DeZure, 2000). Though the development and evaluation of teaching is often the primary role of faculty development centers, most faculty and administrators recognize that in addition to teaching, research support, writing productivity, and publication impact significantly the overall process of becoming a successful academic.

Department chairs and deans who seek ways to mentor junior faculty can meet their own goals in this non-departmental setting. Faculty development centers typically provide workshops, resource libraries, and individual professional consultations on teaching and evaluation. A panel of chief academic officers speaking at the 2001 Great Plains Regional Conference of Teaching Centers addressed the issue of faculty development. Sandra Gautt, Assistant Provost at the University of Kansas, claimed that working with new faculty provides the ideal opportunity to “grow a culture of faculty development, wherein regular participation in a faculty development program could be tied to evaluation, merit, and tenure and promotion decisions” (personal communication). The ideas presented in this paper extend this ideal by integrating faculty and professional development staff into a joint venture to acculturate faculty. By providing a structure for mentoring, a model for promoting leadership among senior faculty is underscored.

Another panel member, Robert Kindrick, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research at Wichita State University, defined the role of faculty development as “helping people understand what they need to do to plot a professional life” and he stressed the need to work with both new and senior faculty. All the panelists remarked that providing mentors and building a network of support and collegiality were key to faculty productivity (personal communication). Precedents exist for campus-wide writing support programs, and studies show successful publication can result from a campus-wide writing support program for faculty and professional staff. Faery (1993) describes a program that integrated discussion of student writing and faculty writing. Participants commented on the benefits of such a program in terms of cross-disciplinary collegiality and overall support. In addition, faculty specifically identified how their writing changed as a result of the workshop. Fassinger, Gilliland and Johnson (1992) utilized a faculty writing circle, and reported generalization to improved teaching practices.

**Description of Write On! Goals and Activities**

This paper highlights a case study example of faculty acculturation, specifically related to professional writing, directly connected to a faculty development center. Write On!, the writing support group which is the focus of this paper, was sponsored by a Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT). While the primary focus of the Center’s activities was instructional development and support, the Write On! program fit within the overall mission statement of the CELT. By embedding our program within an established and respected division of the college’s Academic Affairs office, the program gained legitimacy and access to resources it might not have had otherwise. We conceptualized the program initially as an outreach program which would grow into a support group, based on the understanding that “a sense of professional isolation is identified as a strong inhibitor to scholarly publication” (Cremer & Engstrom, 1996). Our goal was to set up the writing support group model to reflect the broad goals of faculty development defined by Wergin, Mason, and Munson (1976) as “helping faculty members function more comfortably and effectively in the university setting” (291).

Rodd (2001) recommends encouraging collaboration, creating opportunities for faculty development, and maintaining an environment where faculty members “feel free to innovate, change, and improve” as a way to shift the focus from a deficit model—highlighting what a junior faculty member is not doing—to a collaborative model, wherein strengths are collected and shared and the campus can benefit from an institution-wide support system. This model can help junior faculty while rejuvenating senior faculty who are participating in an activity that has built-in generativity.

Thirty individuals expressed interest (of over 300 faculty and professional staff), and most of these thirty became involved in one or more parts of the program during the course of the year. During the
fall semester, the program was limited to monthly sessions, while during the spring semester, the program was expanded to include three campus-wide events in addition to the monthly meetings. (See Appendix A)

In order to better understand the value of the program, follow-up with all who participated took place at the end of the year. Phase 1 of the follow-up consisted of mailing surveys to all thirty faculty and professional staff members who expressed initial interest in the program. The completed surveys were mailed directly to a graduate research assistant, who had no prior contacts with the participants in the program. Phase 2 consisted of follow-up phone calls to survey respondents by the graduate research assistant who had received the surveys; in preparation for this project, she received training in qualitative interviewing techniques. Questions were posed, based on issues raised in each individual's completed survey. After pseudonyms had been assigned, the results of the surveys and the phone call interviews were shared with the program developers. An analysis of reports from participants in this program led us to identify three major outcome categories.

Professional Development and Publication-Related Challenges Faced by Junior Faculty and Professional Staff

Theme #1: Transitions, Expectations, and Writerly Identity

During the yearlong program, one theme emerged clearly: junior faculty and professional staff, struggle to see themselves as capable producers of academic writing. Fox (1985) describes the difficulties new faculty face when making the transition from graduate student to academic: fresh Ph.D. holders frequently encounter reduced collegial support for research and writing.

Faculty and professional staff may attempt to shift their self-perceptions—based in large part on a prior discipline-based context for scholarly productivity—to match that of their current academic settings. Writing support groups have been found useful for providing a forum in which new faculty can express anxiety while gaining a new understanding of their own writerly identities. For example, Gauen (1993) describes a writing support program specifically aimed at junior women faculty members, similar to Write on!, with goals such as increased productivity and developing identities as scholarly writers (98). The author, an associate dean in charge of the program, drew the following conclusion:

In workshops and retreats we can introduce junior faculty to productivity strategies used by successful colleagues. But like many individuals seeking to change long-standing habits, junior faculty also benefit from structured social supports to develop and maintain new work patterns...Participating in a writing group, though, improves the odds that help will be forthcoming. (99)

Gauen concludes that a writing support program has the potential to extend its impact beyond the development of scholarly habits to also assist in the acculturation process for junior faculty:

The writing support group does more than help junior women faculty find time for writing...the simple experience of sharing writing conflicts and celebrating both large and small successes may serve to quell self-doubts and strengthen hard-won but sometimes fragile professional identities. (99-100)

Participant self-assessments and comments from interviews include such comments as: I am a new professor; I need to find a mentor and get focused. Another novice academic writer, speaking of being in the writing group with a seasoned and published faculty member, said, I liked that she was in the program...she had a whole lot of knowledge to give us, and she still felt that she could improve her writing. So knowing that no matter where you are in your writing process or where you are in your career, writing is a concern...and you can still keep learning about it. One of the functions of a writing support group composed of senior and junior faculty, as well as professional staff, is the perforation of the illusion that senior faculty have transcended writing-related challenges. Tara found the company of the prolific writers...very inspirational.
The self-concepts of faculty members, as well as their writing habits, contributed to their establishment of consistent scholarly habits. Participants in our program described ways they gained confidence and a sense of themselves as writers from their network of support. Tracy, a teaching assistant, recognized that empathy and experience could facilitate her accomplishments. She reported that this group helped me to realize that people further advanced, academically and professionally, had many of the fears and roadblocks that I had. The meetings started me on the way to gaining confidence in writing.

Theme #2: Goal-setting

Related to the appropriation or refinement of identity as a scholarly writer is the need to assess writing skills and set goals. At the outset of the program, members of Write On! reported difficulties in establishing a writerly identity and saw specific writing-related issues as roadblocks: I had decided to brush up on my writing skills, ...and I felt that I was lacking confidence in my skills. My goals were to improve my writing confidence. At the end of the year, the same participant reported the following: I achieved my goals. I noticed that I achieved my goals because I wasn't having stress about writing. I was more relaxed and confident that I would have output (Lita). This writer made a transition from uncertainty and focus on skills to self-assurance and self-reliance in the course of a single year. The setting of goals, and participation in the writing group, helped this writer, as well as others, to modify original goals. This modification was an outcome perceived to be related to the Write On! program.

Theme #3: Productivity and Task Management

More accurate understanding of how time is, and can be used, for scholarly productivity was an ongoing thread of discussion in our program. Several participants in the campus writing group cited a reallocation of writing time as a positive outcome of the group. The time organization information was very helpful. Another participant recalled, I would just sit down at the computer and hope that something happened, but after [the workshop on] time manage-

The presence of senior and junior faculty members in the writing program gave a different focus to the conversations about productivity than might have taken place with junior faculty only. Senior faculty who discussed their own frustrations and need to improve their writing habits illustrated to the junior faculty that development of self-reflective habits were lifelong aspects of their new roles as scholars in an academic setting. One participant, a much more proficient, senior member of the group, found discussions of strategies to be useful. [The program] certainly sharpened my time management skills—it gave them a real boost (Sally). Participation of senior faculty led to informal mentoring, tacitly underscoring the importance of writing in an academic setting.

Conclusion

In reflecting on the publication-related challenges described above (those related to professional development, personal management, and support networks), the reliance of faculty on the institution-wide norms emerges as a key prerequisite. Junior faculty and professional staff members (seeking to make their transitions to a new set of professional habits) search for clues and messages to help them; they realize that they need to know what is expected for them to establish themselves in their profession, and achieve tenure and promotion at their institution. While in some Research I and II institutions, the expectations are explicit from the outset, many comprehensive colleges are similar to the institution described in this paper—ambiguity leads to anxiety.

The program described in this paper had two
intertwined connections to the faculty center. First, the writing group was sponsored by the center, and thereby gained resources and legitimacy. Second, via the explicit intention of helping beginning faculty and professional staff members, members of the campus community were encouraged to learn about, and take advantage of, resources related to scholarly productivity available to them at the center, related to scholarly productivity.

The design of the program was based on leadership models that were more horizontal than vertical. The writing group was intentionally heterogeneous, in a number of ways. By initially inviting all campus faculty and professional staff members to participate in the writing program, along with those newly hired, this program illustrated that the development and maintenance of effective writing habits must be addressed throughout the academic's life cycle. This model was intentionally different from a peer support model for junior faculty only (e.g., Follo, Gibson, Eckart, & Tracy, 1995), one based on academic discipline, or characteristics of the members (e.g., Gainen, 1993, a writing support group for junior women faculty). Both senior and junior faculty were involved. This expanded potential audience provides a way to address broader concerns, coinciding with department chairs' concerns about the lack of publications and productivity of some senior faculty members as well.

The active support of writing agendas, via a visible campus program, helped participants to work toward the overall goal of self-efficacy, which coincides with Senge's notion of personal mastery, introduced at the start of the paper. This goal also fits with expectations of the productive, scholarly academic (e.g. Boyer, 1990).

**Personal mastery and mental models**

In the development of productivity, individuals need to establish their own personal mastery of their scholarly agenda. This begins with a scrutiny of how they go about setting and achieving their writing goals, leading to the development of a mental model. The examination of productive academics (e.g. Hunter & Kuh, 1987; Hunter, 1986) has yielded common characteristics of academics who regularly incorporate writing into their academic lives. For those individuals, the teacher and the writer are not at odds. Boice, in his extensive writings about faculty who are inhibited in their writing productivity (e.g. 1990, 1992a, 1992b, 1994, 1995), reports that many unproductive (or beginning) academics experience a disconnect between their image of writing and the accomplishment of their writing tasks. Whether generalized anxiety, time management, or other obstacles intrude, unproductive writers do not "picture" themselves getting their writing done.

The model of a writing support group in this paper utilized a variety of methods to help individuals "picture" themselves more productively and constructively. These "mental models" ranged from the whimsical (e.g., actually inviting members of the group to bring in their own visual depictions of themselves in their writing cycle) to the pragmatic (a breakfast colloquium featuring five successful campus authors). As shown in comments within this paper, by the end of the program, many participants were able to see themselves in new ways, directly envisioning the achievement of their writing goals.

A potential benefit, which could be explored in future research, would be to examine the extent to which elements of a writing support program are extended to pedagogy. Faery (1993) specifically looked at the spin-off effects of faculty writing circles for campus-wide writing-across-the-curriculum programs. The development of mental models can be the prerequisite for the development of shared vision.

**Building shared vision**

The needs of the group became more and more explicit as the group progressed, leading to the development of a shared vision. Both POD (the Professional and Organizational Development Network) and Senge (1990) address this particular topic. For POD, one of the identified aspects of faculty development is related to the faculty member as a person. This aspect corresponds to Senge's components of building a shared vision, in that thinking about faculty members within their social contexts can illustrate the extent to which the faculty member has been socialized into the academic community. Eventually, in Senge's paradigm, shared vision leads to systems thinking.
Systems thinking

As cited earlier in the paper, Robert Kindrick, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research at Wichita State University, an advocate of professional development, stated that it was the institution's responsibility to provide professional development which can “help people understand what they need to do to plot a professional life.” The project described in this paper began with the goal of creating a place where a support group could influence both writers and the writing. Support group influence and related results—i.e. better products, increased frequency of completion of writing projects, an increase in accepted publications, and significant progress on a larger work—have the power to transform the potential scholars or the poorly prepared scholars into lifelong scholars. This project, therefore, was directly linked to system-wide concerns—providing the support network needed to create an environment which nurtured scholarship productivity. In looking at the specific project we developed, the creation of a writing support group, however, we see our efforts as exemplifications of the larger institutional goals.

However, in analyzing the project via the “systems thinking” paradigm, it becomes clear that although the program appeared to be connected to institutional goals, it was more dependent on individuals. The program promoted opportunities for scholarly development as well as informal leadership. Through the development of structured activities for a heterogeneous group of academics (including both faculty and professional staff members), a short term writing community was formed. During the period of the program under review, the participants analyzed their habits for scholarly writing, and achieved some of their writing goals.

The program described herein enabled the individuals involved to reframe their experience in seeking tenure and promotion; this proactive support model encouraged the participants to redirect their energy. In addition, campus writers were able to establish a way to connect with each other through formal and informal activities. Finally, the campus benefited from the overall development of individuals who were investing energy in advancing themselves.

In closing, Bolman and Deal's (1997) observations about how individuals engaged in a commitment to an organization can be empowered pertain well to the individuals involved in the Write On! program:

[Individuals] report a liberating sense of choice and power. They are able to develop unique alternatives and novel ideas about what their organizations need. They are better attuned to people and events around them. They are less often startled by organizational perversity, and they learn to anticipate the turbulent twists and turns of organizational life. (17)

Ideally, although the Write On! program is over, new capabilities and intrinsic rewards will continue. We started the program with the goal of creating a place where a support group could influence both the writer and the writing. It is our hope that the increased productivity, attitude shift and renewed efficacy reported by the participants at the conclusion of the study continues to resonate, and that this article will stimulate similar programs at other institutions.

References


We have developed a web archive of the materials used for the Write On! programs [http://people.ku.edu/~meodice/writeon].


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### Matrix of Write On! Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Meetings</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ongoing communication generated from Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching</td>
<td>nine monthly meetings hosted by CELT</td>
<td>time &amp; task management; development and maintaining a project timeline</td>
<td>each meeting and activity was evaluated by participants using formative assessment tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pre-semester mailing to full faculty</td>
<td>many participants remained committed for the full academic year; other members came and went as time allowed</td>
<td>exploring our metaphors for writing processes</td>
<td>assessing pace, content, and organization of session activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>introduction of program at the faculty orientation (sponsored by CELT)</td>
<td>meetings led by co-facilitators</td>
<td>co-facilitators led a guided critique; practice giving and getting peer review</td>
<td>assessing key learning and applicability of activities to writing practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>email to participants throughout the year-long program</td>
<td>each meeting focuses on a theme and ended with an evaluation</td>
<td>manuscript preparation; research and documentation tips</td>
<td>assessing level of expectation; how well program contributed to meeting writing goals set by participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listserv subscribers receive updates and online activities</td>
<td>additional sessions: campus author reception, journal editors reception, closing luncheon</td>
<td>challenges of &quot;riding the publication roller coaster&quot;</td>
<td>conducted post-program interviews, surveys, and discussion to help design future programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>final evaluations and follow-up interviews via mail and phone</td>
<td>several meetings/activities meshed with activities taking place in the campus community</td>
<td>photos, drawings, artwork depicting our writing process/progress</td>
<td>participation in evaluative research in order to analyze program values as related to mentoring and higher education leadership models</td>
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</table>

Visit the program web site for more information and to view an archive of materials used in the Write On! program: people.ku.edu~meodice/writeon