Essays

Using a Faculty Survey to Model Successful Instruction in First-Year Writing: Faculty Development Without Faculty Conflict

Liberty Kohn

Abstract

This article explains the use of an anonymous faculty survey of first-year writing instructional practices distributed to all full-time English faculty. The article also describes the subsequent presentation of the survey results to illustrate successful teaching practices and course design to a department where all tenure-line faculty (literature, creative writing, TESOL/linguistics, and rhet-comp) teach first-year writing. The article details the process of using a faculty survey to quantify and produce strong visual data on effective pedagogy and practice, with the survey results standardizing these positive practices during faculty development sessions. Additionally, this article also investigates how my own departmental survey potentially evidences the long-term effectiveness of graduate training of all English PhDs (rhet-comp, literature, linguistics, creative writing, etc.) in process-based pedagogy over the last several decades, even as my survey highlighted some mild differences in pedagogical approach by English subfield, mainly in reading instruction and the use of low-stakes writing.

WPAs influence and are influenced by the local environment: the program history; the relative experience of teachers; the balance of tenure, untenured, and adjunct positions; the amount of autonomy inside the curriculum and in course design; the longevity of contracts; and many other factors that change from institution to institution. WPAs temper these variations to ensure first-year writing meets a department's goals and outcomes.

In small and medium-sized English departments where tenure-line faculty of different subfields (literature, creative writing, rhet-comp, etc.) teach first-year writing, one issue WPAs face is honoring tenure-line autonomy while simultaneously building a program of concentric course design and pedagogy. This article will detail an anonymous survey of teaching praxis taken by tenure-line faculty and full-time instructors and my use of the survey for purposes of assessment and faculty development.

Department and Program Background

I teach in an English department at a public university with approximately seven thousand students. A great majority of the first-year writing courses in my department is taught by tenure-line professors. Of the tenure-line faculty at the time of the survey, fifteen of twenty had PhDs in and strong loyalties to literature, even if several of these literature PhDs also hold an MFA and function largely as creative writing faculty. In addition to this group of fifteen, two faculty had PhDs in rhetoric and composition—this includes me—and three were TESOL/linguistics specialists. All permanent faculty teach two first-year writing courses a year. Additionally, the department employs several instructors in any given academic year to teach up to three sections of first-year writing a semester, four to six graduate students in our literature MA program who each teach a section a semester, and an adjunct or two to teach sections when necessary. An additional historical oddity of our first-year writing curriculum is that we have just one semester of first-year writing, a four-credit course, English 111.

Additionally, no WPA exists in my department. A WPA would have little domain: these autonomous tenure-line faculty teach approximately forty of the fifty to fifty-five sections of first-year writing annually. Due to faculty autonomy, we also have no established or required textbooks or sequence of assignments for first-year writing. Moreover, I am not a WPA, but I am the semblance of a WPA. I do WPA-like things when my department needs them; technically, I am the chair of the department's Composition Committee, but I am not a WPA "in charge" of first-year writing. From a managerial viewpoint, with no WPA to manage first-year writing, my department's first-year writing experience could easily be conceived of as a free-for-all or nightmare waiting to happen. Yet as I'll detail, our first-year writing has consistency in methods and materials, with only a few outliers pertaining mainly to reading instruction rather than writing instruction.

The tenure-line faculty in my department teach first-year writing as at least a third (eight of twenty-four credits) of their teaching load, a situation not unique to my department. Statistics show many departments have tenure-line faculty teaching first-year writing. According to the 2017 National Census of Writing, four-year universities had ninety-five respondents answer they have tenure-line faculty teach 0% of first-year writing, while 125 four-year respondents acknowledged that between 1% and 49% of their classes were taught by tenure-line faculty. Forty respondents answered that tenure-line faculty teach a percentage of first-year writing classes in the broad range between 50% and 100%, with percentages more numerous in the 50–70% range than in the 90–100% range ("What Percentage of

Sections?"). Based on these numbers, we see that a majority of respondents from four-year universities have tenure-line faculty teaching at least some first-year writing. This fact forces many WPAs to navigate the autonomy and privilege of tenure-line faculty who teach first-year writing.

The goal of my first-year writing teaching survey, outlined in this article, was to provide formative data that would allow us to identify program coherence and improve coherence when missing. Along the way, I discovered other uses of the survey data: to norm good teaching, to imply changes to any respondents that were out of line with best first-year writing practices, and to do this without having to summon solely my own expertise or authority as the reason for change. I learned that, skillfully deployed, the positive results of a departmental survey can serve as a non-confrontational framework to discuss first-year writing amongst an autonomous faculty with a variety of doctoral backgrounds and attitudes toward pedagogy and first-year writing.

Assessing the Instruction of a Largely Tenured First-Year Writing Faculty

Because of a WPA's location between students, faculty, and administration, WPAs are on the frontlines of assessment. Yet what and how to assess can be baffling. Melissa Nicholas states that upper administration will often request that a WPA deliver program assessment, yet there is only a mild chance that the WPA has been told by administration "what kind of information they want" (1). Often, goals may be unclear. Thus, the WPA often has the problem of an "amorphous mandate . . . of what to assess and how to assess [which] can be overwhelming" (11). Nicholas calls for a formative, process-based model of assessment (12)—something that points the way toward specific change and a process to do so.

WPAs not only assess student learning but are responsible for tracking the quality of instruction and offering professional development. Libby Barlow, Steven Liparulo, and Dudley Reynolds argue of assessment that "[u]seful results . . . are actionable, and they can be used by those who would be responsible for action" (54). The results toward action—in this case, improved teaching—can help faculty when assessment of student writing alone cannot provide full insight into the cohesion of a program, first-year writing experience, and faculty teaching methods.

The use of formative assessment on teaching practices fits nicely into a larger move in higher education toward outcomes-based assessment. As Michael Carter reports, "we're used to thinking about education in terms of inputs: . . . . We assume that the inputs we provide students will lead to

certain outcomes" (268). However, differences in course design or delivery of the curriculum, part of the input, can affect student writing, the output One must examine the instructional delivery of the program, the input, on the individual and group level as an element that affects output, that is, outcomes. Carter suggests of outcomes-based assessment that

> faculty identify the educational outcomes for a program and then evaluate the program according to its effectiveness in enabling students to achieve those outcomes. The main advantage of this outcomes perspective is that it provides data for closing the educational feedback loop, that is, faculty can use the results of program assessment to further improve their programs. (268)

Thus, assessment and improvement rely on student writing, the output, and the coherence of faculty instruction across sections of first-year writing, which is the dynamic input clearly linked to student output.

Yet instruction, the input, can vary widely, even inside routine Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) training during graduate school (Mapes, Jacobson, LaMance, and Vogel 67; Cicchino 88). As Amy Cicchino reports, "the teaching preparation that GTAs receive in their doctoral-granting program has impacts that reach beyond the immediacy of [a] graduate-teaching career, having long-term ramifications" (87). Differently trained English PhDs accept teaching positions at new institutions yet bring their old training and disciplinary pedagogies with them. With such differences in pedagogy, a strong case can be made for writing program assessment that captures instruction and curriculum delivery, not just quality of student writing.

How's Our Teaching? Navigating Disciplinary Differences

One of the oldest battles of WPAs, real or imagined, is a pedagogical war between composition and literature, a concern pertinent in my own department where a majority of first-year writing is taught by tenure-line literature faculty. These differences were represented in the pages of *College English* in 1993 through the infamous point-counterpoint of Gary Tate and Erica Lindemann on the content and methods of first-year writing. In this debate Tate represents the sage-on-stage literature professor who lectures and runs a teacher-centered classroom. Lindemann, the composition specialist, represents a student-oriented, process-oriented first-year writing classroom aligned with composition's preferences for active learning, writing as a recursive process, and writing as a college survival skill that should be transferable to other courses. Tate v. Lindemann captures well the (real or imagined) literature and composition duality.

And how real or imagined is this divide now, several decades later? My survey suggests WPAs shouldn't rush to battle with literature faculty. The scant scholarship on mixed departments teaching first-year writing sketches a continuum that runs from outright hostility, to ignorance, to sympathetic misunderstanding, to collaborative vision.[1]

Because teaching first-year writing is often a prerequisite in small departments for literature or non-rhet-comp specialists, teaching duties automatically have the potential to create hostile faculty who are forced to teach composition, harming student progress (Mastrangelo and Decker 61). However, the stereotype of the "hostile literature professor" may no longer be the norm, as "[t]he tenure track faculty members almost certainly respect the need to teach first-year composition and may be good at it, [even as] they probably have not been trained in composition as an academic field" (Kearns 52). In mixed departments such as my own, I find my colleagues would agree with Paula Krebs, who states, "We should find the commonalities with other specialists, for the sake of the English major we all shape" (69). First-year writing is still the most visible function of the English department across the university. A strong repartee between mixed faculty teaching first-year writing strengthens messaging from the English department while building strong first-year writing programs. Moreover, we should doubt the stereotypical framing of the composition/literature divide.

GTA Training as a Remedy for the Lit/Comp Divide?

The 1993 Tate v. Lindemann dialogue is coeval with the slow introduction of GTA composition methods courses during the 1980s and 90s (Tremmel). That is, Tate v. Lindemann coincides with the rapid adoption of first-year writing methods courses for GTAs in English Studies during the 1990s. This near ubiquitous implementation of methods courses was so thorough by the 1990s that methods courses achieved something akin to national policy and were often a topic of discussion in *WPA: Writing Program Administration* (e.g., Latterell; Cogie; Blakemore; Barr Ebest) and in edited collections such as Betsy Pytlik and Sarah Liggett's *Preparing College Teachers of Writing: Histories, Theories, Programs, Practices* and Sally Barr Ebest's *Changing the Way We Teach*. During this period, WPAs got serious about graduate-level professional development and first-year writing training across the US, even if methods of training differed (and may still differ today) from program to program, and no clear study or consensus proves any particular GTA training program better than another (Cicchino 88).

Mastrangelo and Decker argue in a 2020 *ADE Bulletin* that "an increasing number of graduate programs, particularly ones where rhetoric and

composition have a strong presence, insist that all graduate students in English have training in composition theory through seminars, teaching practicums, and extracurricular workshop" (61). Recent data would suggest this true. Examination of the 2017 National Census of Writing's Four-Year Institution Survey asked the question of its participants teaching first-year writing, "What types of initial training is (sic) provided [for first-year writing]?" The results show a great majority of graduate students (87%) take an entire course, while other opportunities and/or requirements in teaching composition also exist. Only five graduate students of 113 who took the survey reported having no training, or, one assumes, at least no mandatory training ("What Types of Initial Training?"). If we trace adoption of GTA programs to the 1990s and early 2000s, it's clear that, over the past two decades, rhet-comp has built a dominant, predictable presence of GTA first-year writing methods courses. Why does this matter now? Currently, WPAs can assume that most English PhDs and MAs with degrees outside of rhet-comp in the last twenty-five years (i.e., most faculty today) will have taken a GTA methods course. These GTA courses now provide WPAs with pedagogical and curricular reference points to discuss first-year writing instruction as a national, cross-institutional set of values and practices.

The Usefulness of an Anonymous Survey to Model Good Instruction

For the WPA interested in assessing first-year writing teaching practices across a department, one question looms: How do I track course materials and variety of instruction amongst colleagues of diverse backgrounds? If a majority of first-year writing instructors are autonomous tenure-line faculty, a second question arises: How might I influence or standardize good teaching of first-year writing amongst tenured faculty who aren't obligated to teach first-year writing as composition wishes? I began to answer these questions with my knowledge that most of my colleagues had a semester-long GTA course in grad school that I could refer to when seeking to norm first-year writing instruction. I also answered these questions through a departmental survey, which would highlight best teaching practices from within our own department.[2]

I was curious how our first-year writing courses resembled a "prototypical" first-year writing course and, conversely, how a course might take on qualities of a literature course due to so many literature-based faculty members teaching first-year writing. As the *de facto* WPA, I also wished to influence first-year writing practices and materials without creating any conflict amongst a highly independent, tenured faculty who gets along well,

who takes first-year writing seriously, and who can work together to get hard things done on the departmental level. Lastly, I spent time with both my chair and the several member Composition Committee crafting and revising the questions to avoid resistance or offense to my colleagues, all of whom earnestly take up the challenge of first-year writing despite different pedagogical influences and professional interests.

In terms of the survey's local uses, I knew the results could easily be used to frame our first-year writing coherence, while also identifying problems and suggesting interventions. On a scholarly level, I now believe the survey's results also point to another aspect of professional development: the effectiveness of English departments' GTA methods courses since the 1990s. My survey demonstrates that literature and creative writing faculty in my department are clearly using first-year writing teaching methods learned in their graduate school GTA seminar; with no WPA, they are using them because they want to. Thus, concerning national best practices, the adoption of methods seminars in English graduate study since the 1990s and early 2000s has, at least in my department, greatly unified our delivery of first-year writing, even with no WPA.

The Survey

All permanent faculty teaching first-year writing received a survey of mainly multiple choice questions that pertained to the following: types of writing assignments and assignment sequences; types of and amount of reading assigned; number of papers assigned; the relationship between assigned reading and high-stakes writing; the use and forms of low-stakes writing; the use of peer-review workshops, one-on-one student conferences, and ability to revise; and the daily distribution of activities (reading quizzes, reading guides, small group work, lecture, discussion of reading, free writing, practice of modeled writing, etc.). A copy of the survey questions can be accessed by scanning the QR code at the end of this article.[3, 4]

These topics define assessment territory: characteristics of instructors, material conditions, pedagogical strategies, the role of textbooks, teacher preparation and professional development, and identity issues (Yancey 65). One major criterion, by my own thinking, was to see if faculty were running a process-based classroom, regardless of course design. After all, first-year writing classroom materials and instruction can be diverse: the writing process is less linear and more individualized than the prewriting-writing-revising sequence implies (Lindemann, *Rhetoric* 31), and first-year writing classrooms can contain diverse reading experiences and paper topics taken from cultural studies, critical theory, political issues, or discourse

communities (Smit 193-195). Since I was seeking a standard amongst these diverse practices, a fair representation of process-based pedagogy for me as WPA was the ability of students to pre-write and draft slowly over several class meetings, workshop papers with other students, conference with an instructor, and have at least one opportunity to revise. The above is a basic description of process pedagogy in scholarly literature (Smit 193) with the major emphasis of process pedagogy falling on revision activities (Koster Tarvers and Moore 109).

Nineteen of twenty-two faculty completed the survey, with a twentieth participant completing approximately half the survey, an apparent anomaly of the technology as I used it. This high response rate is likely due to the earnestness of my colleagues to create a positive first-year writing experience for students and our department. I also benefitted from being invited by the chair to spend our two-hour Assessment Day meeting discussing the results of the survey. This promised two-hour block of time offered a good reason to complete the survey—faculty were going to discuss the results for two hours, so they may as well take the survey. And the two-hour block of time was a key to discussing, rather than me lecturing on, the survey results.

However, to best use the survey to highlight strengths while also addressing inconsistencies or weak practices, I needed to consider how to present the material to the department during the two-hour session. As Nicholas points out of assessment work with tenured faculty, any "apparent 'secrecy' of [a] project" can quickly transform to "political complication" (21). I knew that even in my collegial, practical department, everyone has a tendency to, if not politicize, at least rationalize their teaching methods as effective and meeting guidelines to justify or shield against any undesirable feelings or criticism.

It is worth noting that several faculty members did voice concern during a department meeting where I announced the survey. These faculty felt, if not spied upon, a bit intruded upon. Both the department chair and I reassured faculty that the survey was about providing a decently uniform student experience in a department of great autonomy as well as making sure that we could tell our dean and university that we were holding up our end of the bargain in providing students the basics of academic writing. In short, the survey wasn't a witch hunt, but the collection of evidence of our successful first-year writing program. With this reassurance, we received a 90% survey completion rate.

The Presentation and Discussion of Survey Results

I chose to not go over each survey question during the two-hour presentation. Rather, I wanted to review positive results of important issues to build good will and buffer defensiveness, then shift toward results in which a minority of individuals were likely not preparing and scaffolding instruction for students as much as possible. Because I had used the survey technology Qualtrics, I was prepared to easily display any results in bar graph form if asked.

I began the presentation by reinforcing our group success and displaying the similarities amongst our materials and instruction. I began with types of writing assignments, assignment sequences, and number of formal pages of writing. These were uniform and positively met our departmental goals and outcomes. We averaged three to four major assignments, nearly all of them based in argument, analysis, or research writing with small appearances of narrative-based assignments by some faculty as an initial assignment. We averaged twenty pages of formal writing, and everyone had at least fifteen pages of formal writing.

Concerning the core of process-based pedagogy—feedback and revision—the results registered a strong process-based pedagogy: although several questions were needed (see survey questions 12 and 13) to get an accurate snapshot, all respondents held peer review workshops before final submission of papers. Fourteen faculty members also included one-on-one conferences or instructor feedback; four faculty members mandated revision when necessary (likely when the paper needed significant revision); and two faculty members utilized portfolios.

The survey allowed instructors to tally multiple processes for revision, so the results are affected by the overlap of instructors' multiple policies of revision—for instance, an instructor utilizing portfolios may also be holding one-on-one conferences and using student peer review, allowing them to tally in each category. Nevertheless, all respondents indicate using student peer review workshops, a basic form of process pedagogy. Fourteen instructors (74%) also review the paper and offer feedback through writing or a one-on-one conference before final submission. This means, of course, that approximately a quarter of the respondents (five) do not offer feedback before final submission; however, these faculty may include the four faculty who require revision upon request, or the two faculty who use a portfolio that allows for revision. The survey was too blunt, even with multiple questions on some topics, to fully capture the nuance of what these five faculty members did instead of holding one-on-one conferences or offering feedback prior to final submission.[5]

Although the details of particular instructors remain a bit murky, clearly faculty are adhering to components of process-based pedagogy. To any faculty who were unaware or not practicing early formative feedback and revision opportunities, the above numbers, however imprecise, are an impressive showing of the use of formative feedback, conferencing, and/or revision by a large majority of the department. These numbers themselves are a data-driven way to display how process-based methods dominate first-year writing in our department, regardless of faculty subfield, to any potential holdouts on running a process-based or revision-based classroom.

I next selected reading instruction as a topic of interest for our faculty development session. I discussed the types of books assigned and the amount of reading per week. The survey showed that everyone in the department had books that counted as a "reader"—mainly long non-fiction books or an anthology of essays. Everyone also had some form of a "rhetoric," a textbook outlining the basics of the writing process. I solicited further discussion of textbooks during the two-hour session, hoping that faculty might share the benefits of their rhetoric with each other, as I knew that some faculty had short handbooks that focused as much on grammar and citation as the writing process.

I didn't seek to control this discussion. I hoped that faculty with fantastic rhetorics might advocate for their effectiveness, which they did. When I spoke, I spoke of student needs: students needing student-level models, pre-writing heuristics, and similar process-based textbook fare that might be absent if faculty were using skill-and-drill handbooks as their "rhetoric." I let faculty discuss how better rhetorics had process components that guided students through the creation of an argument. In this way, faculty coached each other to try something new if necessary. I chimed in at times to re-focus the discussion on particular student needs.

Softening Resistance During Faculty Development

Effective teaching practices, even when evidenced by scholarship on teaching and learning, can be called into question quickly. Although I expected no (and received no) negative comments with my English colleagues, I continuously used survey data to influence good instruction in important or problematic areas. I would begin discussion of a topic by showing the survey question along with its visually represented answer (bar graph). After reading the question, I would standardize the positive answers, kindly note any problematic outliers, then acknowledge the difficulty of a multiple-choice question capturing the complexity of an issue. Next, I would solicit comments from colleagues doing good work in these areas.

For example, my leading of discussion sounded like this: "Next, we have the question 'How many of your assignments require the use of documented sources external to a course text?'" Then, I would load the following slide:
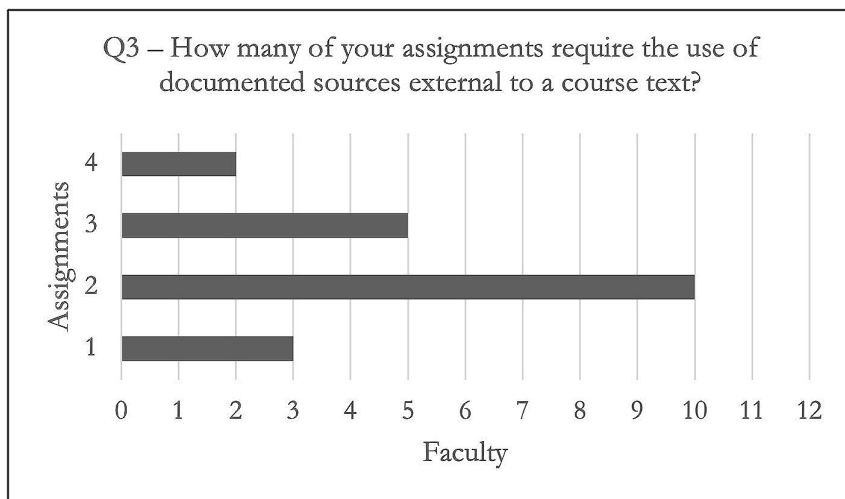

Figure 1. Documented Sources in an Assignment

I would continue,

> Just looking over a snapshot of our work as a department, we might say that a large majority of us believe that at least two assignments should require secondary sources. The data shows that a few of us require secondary sources for only one assignment. Mary, I know your course requires sources early, at least by the mid-point of the semester. I'm wondering if you could tell me why you design your course this way—and maybe how you scaffold and layer source use across your course.

After letting "Mary" explain her course for a few minutes, with my own comments minimal, standardizing my own goals as they arrived in Mary's answer, I might next give "Barbara" the floor, with a slightly different question emphasizing early source use: "Barbara, I know you have an interesting place you like to see students finish in their research and source use at the end of the semester. Could you tell us what it is and how you scaffold source use early in the semester to get them there?"

My main goal was to have others advocate for the topic under discussion. I'd also note my purposeful avoidance of concentrating on the three colleagues who required sources in only one paper. Change doesn't come

through statements eliciting shame, blame, or incorrectness (with faculty or students in one's trust); moreover, it is hard to know exactly how secondary texts may appear in my colleagues' courses. I found it important to leave a non-accusatory space for faculty to discuss their own teaching, whatever its form. A WPA shouldn't rush to assumptions here. Norming the positive practices of the majority, in this case a large majority, is a great way to suggest change for those who are open to it.

Addressing Disciplinary Differences: Reading Instruction and Materials

We next shifted into reading instruction, one area where the department also shared a fair amount of similarity in their assigned readings, but an area that I found potentially problematic because, across answers, the majority of the faculty had a general pattern of assigning novel-length works of non-fiction or fiction with a paper due after each, even if the largest survey category included short works with the long work. Here, the data masked as much as it revealed: how exactly were these short works being incorporated by faculty? How much argument, not narrative, existed in the long works faculty preferred? In this case, the data pointed to the need for an important discussion in the undervalued area of reading instruction and the reading-to-write process.
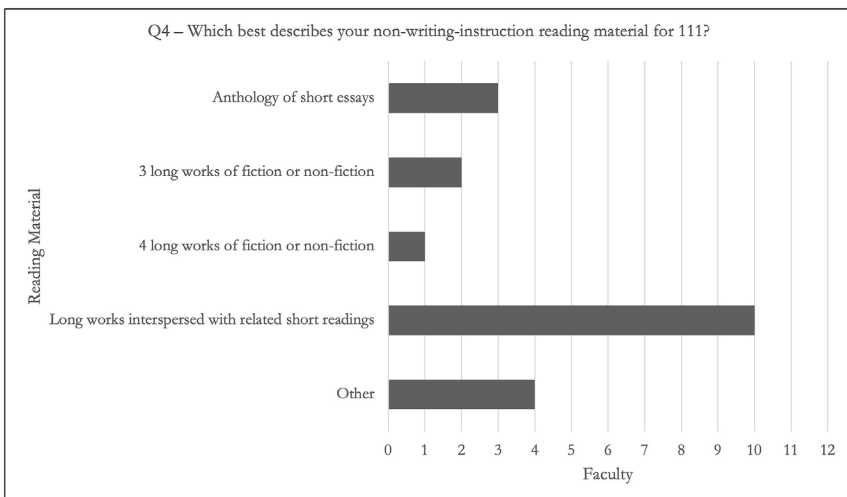

Figure 2. Non-writing Instruction Reading Material

This method of reading instruction and reading-to-write based in long works is different than many first-year writing experiences, in which students are

typically exposed to a variety of genres and have mainly short, anthology-based readings with perhaps a long work. Additional to this data about long primary readings, sixteen faculty members did require additional scholarly sources for at least two, if not three or four, of their writing assignments, to create intertextuality. However, three respondents required external scholarly sources for only a single paper (see figure 2). I made sure to note this majority emphasis on multiple source-based assignments to allow us to discuss how faculty were (hopefully) creating intertextuality and synthesis as well as modeling argument when working mainly with a primary text of novel-length.

I spent my time focusing on the reading and reading-to-write process, which are areas where the literature-heavy background of the faculty tipped the department away from the typical reading materials of first-year writing. Using the survey, I wanted to again let faculty discuss how they were teaching reading and how they were connecting reading (and multiple texts) to their writing assignments. I once again advocated for my concerns: teaching multiple genres, including short and long readings, and not having all papers simply be an interpretation of a book of fiction or non-fiction. Both primary and secondary sources can be used many ways, and papers that consistently ask for a response or interpretation of a sole text limit the forms of synthesis that could be experienced in first-year writing.

When I spoke of reading, I pointed out the challenges of gaining multiple perspectives on an issue if reading only a long work of non-fiction (or fiction) that may provide limited counterargument or alternative viewpoints. However, to support the importance of variation in reading-to-write, I plumbed my colleagues' materials and instruction for positive examples. A share of faculty assigned shorter readings that did introduce alternative perspectives on their long non-fiction readings, and I channeled the discussion as I could to let these faculty discuss the reasons why they chose a mixture of readings as opposed to a single long text. Their reasons aligned with introducing counterargument more easily or visibly, seeing texts as in discussion with each other, and providing more genres and different reading experiences. Again, I only brought up the salient issues, suggesting that students might benefit from reading multiple genres or a reading process that required new forms of synthesis in ongoing assignments. My own discussion prompts sounded something like, "When teaching long works of novel length, what do you all do to ensure genre diversity and genre awareness when a long work may not provide it? And what aspects of genre and the uses of short texts in first-year writing does the survey question not capture?" I cued discussions amongst faculty to express how they were achieving these reading goals in the classroom, and perhaps have

those who teach just one long text per paper silently ponder any absences in reading instruction or materials and also ponder the benefits of short, non-literary texts to supplement reading instruction.

Using the Survey Data to Suggest Change: Reading

The discussion of reading materials prompted debate about reading instruction, which is symptomatic of an absence of discussion of college-level reading instruction in rhetoric and composition (Sullivan 233; Odom n.p.). The survey showed most members of the department assigned forty to seventy pages of reading per week of content reading. However, several faculty members were once again outliers, with three assigning eighty to one hundred pages a week (see figure 4), likely too much for students to read closely in a class that meets just twice a week, especially if reading from a "rhetoric" was also being assigned.

Two faculty members assigned only ten pages a week, likely too little. I highlighted the department norm and outliers. The ensuing discussion of reading instruction created the greatest difference of opinion amongst faculty, mainly about how students learn to read, and how to work with students who, as one colleague put it, "don't like to read anymore." Moreover, the above data are helpful because no one tells you in graduate school how much reading to assign, even as "everyone knows" writing three papers a semester is typical. The survey helped us explore standards and practices toward this unanswered question of how much reading to assign.

From this question, I also learned that a portion of faculty members believe that students will learn to read better by simply having more assigned reading—more pages equal more practice reading; it follows that these faculty wished to assign a maximum number of pages. I played devil's advocate here, suggesting that students would also benefit from reading shorter, controlled pieces that allow them to practice multiple and specific reading strategies introduced by the instructor. (Not to mention that students may not be reading the overwhelming amount of assigned pages, therein not improving reading comprehension, a point I left to my colleagues to say aloud.) Additionally, approximately 40–50% of students at my institution are first-generation students who work part-to-full time, and the amount of reading expected of students may depend upon an individual student body's characteristics and time constraints, an additional programmatic factor for discussion.

I framed my concerns through composition research on transfer and metacognition by stating that "discussion" of a text doesn't equate to drawing out a replicable, transferable reading strategy—that is, instructors often

utilize "discussion" of a reading without clear goals or clear modeling of reading methods or strategies (Joliffe 478). I knew that research demonstrates students are often unclear on how to monitor their reading, but that successful readers are aware of their strategies (Baker and Beall 384). I paraphrased reading guru David Joliffe, who argues, "Students have to read in college composition, but seldom does anyone tell them how or why they should read" (474). Awareness of reading strategy and targeted reading skills are likely better; thus, the assumptive pedagogy of "assigning a lot of pages" was beneficial to discuss with my colleagues, and I suggest that questions probing reading instruction would benefit any survey of faculty teaching practices.

I also wanted to strongly advocate for texts that might serve as a model of the academic style, length, and genre that students would be asked to write. I knew from the survey that 74% of the department (fourteen respondents) used past students' writing as models. Others used professional models, and only two respondents provided no models, which I termed in the survey "I believe students learn best through experimentation, not example." With fourteen of my colleagues utilizing student models, I argued for providing professional and student argument models: studies show that students tend to replicate in their own writing the genre they read—for instance, students write in a more narrative style when offered only narrative readings (Grabe 252), a potential problem if using narrative to teach argument. Thus, reading models of argument, not solely fiction or literary non-fiction, are important inclusions in a first-year writing course, a point I wanted my colleagues to discuss, as many of them are literature specialists with a potential default toward literary pedagogy and long narratives.

Using the Survey Data to Suggest Change: Low-Stakes Writing

The survey showed three faculty members were not having students do low-stakes writing outside of class, and two faculty were not having students do writing during class, leaving student reading and invention relatively unsupported. I made sure to highlight this result. When I put the bar graphs on the screen for the questions about low-stakes writing, I said,

> The survey shows that sixteen of us have students perform low-stakes writing outside of class. Only three of us do not. Also, seventeen of us have students produce writing routinely during class time. You can see we have a strong faculty preference here in what we believe

students need. Students are likely more prepared for classroom tasks and papers because of this practice of writing outside of and inside the classroom.

This was, of course, my way of norming low-stakes writing to the several anonymous instructors that appeared to not have any low-stakes "practice" or reflective writing prior to major papers.

I didn't draw attention to these anonymous faculty members after their initial mention, whoever they were. I did use phrases that, because of the large majority who were using low-stakes writing outside and inside the classroom, confirmed how much we must believe low-stakes writing helps students. I again solicited some discussion on why people felt low-stakes writing was important and what forms they used in their own teaching: this included out-of-class journals, in-class freewriting, reading responses, and similar fare. In what was one of the best moments of the session, one senior faculty member raised his hand and said, "I'm one of those people who doesn't have students write outside of class. I had no idea that everyone was doing that. We didn't do that when I was an undergraduate." The faculty member was simply unaware of how many of his colleagues, regardless of departmental subfield, used various forms of low-stakes writing previous to class to set up everyday classroom activities. He promised to take all recommendations to heart.

Letting Colleagues Select Best Practices

After spending an hour discussing select survey data to reinforce or explore our first-year writing instructional practices, I switched to a different strategy for the second hour. Faculty had been asked to print out their high-stakes writing assignments and organize them in sequence. I had faculty break into groups of four, share their sequences and assignments, then nominate one set of assignments as a shining example of a first-year writing course that addresses all goals and outcomes while providing well-rounded reading and writing experiences that satisfied our English 111 outcomes and goals. My goal in this activity was to have the department, not myself, standardize effective materials and instruction.

This collaborative small group activity was borrowed from WAC workshops I had run, in which faculty members (typically of different disciplines in WAC) read each other's assignments to identify points of confusion as a reader/interpreter of the assignment. In WAC settings, this allows for faculty to read a colleague's assignments from a novice's perspective, pointing out confusions. The idea is that faculty may blame students as poor interpreters of assignments but are less willing to blame colleagues for being

poor interpreters of their assignment. In my first-year writing faculty development setting, my goal was to have faculty select strong first-year writing materials based upon the norms identified in our first hour together, then share to create positive social pressure.

This second hour went well, with several groups nominating one sequence, then explaining the sequence and scaffolding. Nothing highly ineffective or problematic arose during this activity; all assignments passed the muster of this informal departmental review. One group, however, resisted choosing a "best" sequence, instead stating that all courses were exemplary—they didn't wish to pick winners and losers. Despite this egalitarian stance that championed while simultaneously resisting, the activity achieved its goal: the department shared with each other strong sequences of first-year writing and vetted or discussed any potentially confusing or poorly constructed assignments through informal Q&A in small groups.

Final Thoughts on Surveying Instructional Methods and Working with Faculty of Diverse Expertise

The survey served as a fantastic tool to avoid my own imposition as the "writing police" amongst my many colleagues (friends) with English PhDs in a variety of subfields. The survey and two-hour session reserved my expertise, allowing tenured literature (and creative writing and TESOL) faculty to share their strong first-year writing pedagogy, therein standardizing good first-year writing instruction from those of differing areas of specialization in the department. The use of a survey placed me as only a messenger, not the expert or gatekeeper. Yet I clearly had an agenda—one that was likely apparent to all. I offset this highly apparent agenda by selecting faculty members that I knew had strong sequences and practices. This offered superb examples of course designs and practices while simultaneously offering positive, bottom-up social pressure if necessary.

I have several basic suggestions for WPAs who wish to use a first-year writing survey. These suggestions are particularly helpful for those WPAs in departments of tenure-line, autonomous faculty who teach first-year writing:

- Selectively use surveys, not solely your expertise, to norm and promote good writing instruction.
- Solicit faculty input and leadership from literature/creative writing faculty (or other non-composition faculty) who are teaching writing well.

- Remember that reading in first-year writing is a wild card that can change course design; don't forget to include reading instruction in faculty development.
- Surveying faculty on teaching practices (not just student output) can provide data useful to various forms of internal and external assessment.

As a caveat, or perhaps a fifth bullet point, I would include that my department's decently high adherence to a process-based classroom may be dependent upon several factors unique to our department demographic and culture, but that align with my earlier claim that most English PhDs will now, in 2024, have had a semester of GTA first-year writing training that WPAs can use to advantage in mixed departments. This early GTA training is another "voice," or form of evidence, or representation of good teaching to be drawn on by WPAs, a voice that is not one's own, but still a rhet-comp colleague's, even if temporally distant.

I'd like to close this article by briefly opining on how any WPA survey emphasizes some elements of teaching and first-year writing programming, while pushing others to the margin; such is true of my own survey that I inherited, revised, and will seek to revise again in light of anti-racist pedagogy. Looking at the survey now, considering the pressing need for anti-racist pedagogy and curriculum, I can see that first-year writing surveys also offer an opportunity to capture and discuss how anti-racist pedagogies are extant in one's first-year writing program. Tyler S. Branson and James Chase Sanchez argue that "the most important antiracist policy recommendation that programs need to change is in curriculum development" (72); moreover, as they report regarding survey data from their own research on writing programs, "respondents indicated that strategies for combating racism in writing programs happened more or less at the individual level as opposed to extending out of explicit, formalized practices" (72). Thus, in addition to materials, design, and process pedagogy, first-year writing surveys should include questions to gather data and capture best practices on anti-racist pedagogy at the individual level and move it to the programmatic level.[6]

In Memoriam

I would like to dedicate this article to my dear friend and colleague Dr. Ethan Krase (1972–2023). Our offices were just a few steps apart for fourteen years, and we traveled together across stretches of time and space more than once in the name of composition. I miss him, and I believe Ethan

would find it humorous and heartwarming that he appears in this article under the mysterious pseudonym "department chair."
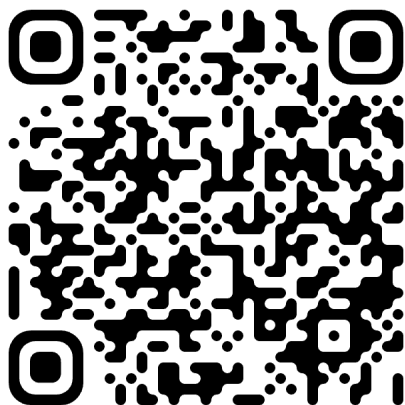
QR Code Link to Survey Instrument: http://bit.ly/kohn-survey-questions

Notes

1. Most of this scholarship, as an early reviewer of this article pointed out, has appeared mainly in rhet-comp journals, a problem, but still not a reason to suspect a war or resistance with colleagues in literature.

2. Even before my arrival in 2009, my department had a history of distributing a first-year writing survey of several dozen questions to all permanent faculty on their teaching practices. The survey was (and remains) both anonymous and voluntary. Faculty are free to share their teaching practices through several dozen mainly multiple-choice questions; during early discussion of the survey during department meetings, I am always sure not to lead or judge by discussing correct or incorrect teaching practices. This neutrality limits resistance by tenure-line faculty to voluntarily taking the survey. I want (and need) to create an atmosphere of non-judgement when we gather data for critical reflection as an organization, as well as data for any external auditors over the forthcoming years. Based upon my department chair's suggestion, I decided to revive a teaching methods survey. I kept many questions from past departmental surveys while also revising the survey to investigate types of instruction and issues related to a student-centered, process-based classroom common to rhet-comp and, I must admit, my own disciplinary biases and practices.

3. I did not survey and assess graduate students and adjuncts as part of this project so that I could get clearer data on permanent faculty only. I observe and mentor graduate students separately as part of a professional development program

once they begin teaching during their second semester of their MA, just after completing their GTA first-year writing pedagogy course.

4. A survey can also track faculty attitudes toward students. Unfortunately, surveys written before my joining of the department contained questions and answers that allowed faculty to, at least indirectly, blame students for being poor writers. I re-structured any attitudinal frameworks so that faculty must assess student learning difficulties based upon students' educational experience, non-educational experiences, and the cognitive and social difficulty of transitioning to college-level work, as opposed to faculty wishing for likely fictional, idealized differently abled students.

5. I did my best to offset these uncertainties by offering another non-intrusive category of revision, "only prior to submission." Only seven respondents tallied this as a response; thus, twelve respondents allow for revision after grading. Again, there is uncertainty, but with a survey allowing for a variety of options, I have to believe that even the 5 faculty members not reviewing papers before submission are likely providing feedback and revision elsewhere, through either a paper-by-paper basis (four respondents), through portfolio (two respondents), or through the ability to revise after an initial grade is given (twelve respondents).

6. As Branson and Sanchez suggest, the "premise of such an exercise is not that mandating diversity changes attitudes. It often doesn't. However, it does reflect the values of the program" (72), and any surveying of teaching practices should invite data toward understanding of anti-racist programming, especially when there "is a lack of literature on race and WPA work" (71). Despite this lack of literature, questions may begin by probing "alternative counterpublics . . . where literacy is associated with ethnolinguistic diverse communities" (Garcia de Mueller and Ruiz 22), why white respondents and respondents of color differ greatly in their "rat[ing of] institutional strategies as effective" (27) in responding to the "intersection of race and linguistic diversity," and how to move beyond methods where "student support only means a recognition of diverse groups, and reduces support to special groups and lectures" (29). A first-year writing survey that targets anti-racist teaching practices is a tool to begin productive discussion of support for students and faculty of color.

Works Cited

Baker, Linda and Lisa Carter Beall. "Metacognitive Processes and Reading Comprehension." *Handbook of Research on Reading Comprehension*, edited by Susan E. Israel and Gerald G. Duffy, Routledge, 2009, pp. 373–88.

Barlow, Libby, Steven P. Liparulo, and Dudley W. Reynolds. "Keeping Assessment Local: The Case of Accountability Through Formative Assessment." *Assessing Writing,* vol. 12, 2007, pp. 44–59.

Barr Ebest, Sally. "The Next Generation of WPAs: A Study of Graduate Students in Composition/Rhetoric." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 22, no. 3, 1999, pp. 65–84.

—. *Changing the Way We Teach: Writing and Resistance in the Training of Teaching Assistants*. Southern Illinois UP, 2005.

Blakemore, Peter. "An Intentionally Ecological Approach to Teacher Training." *WPA: Writing Program Administration,* vol. 21, no. 2/3, 1998, pp. 137–49.

Branson, Tyler S. and James Chase Sanchez. "Programmatic Writing Approaches to Antiracist Writing Program Policy" *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2021, pp. 71–76.

Carter, Michael. "A Process for Establishing Outcomes-Based Assessment Plans for Writing and Speaking in the Disciplines." *Assessing Writing: A Critical Sourcebook*, edited by Brian Huot and Peggy O'Neill, NCTE/Bedford St. Martins, 2009, pp. 268–86.

Cicchino, Amy "A Broader View: How Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition Prepare Their Students to Teach Rhetoric and Composition." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2020, pp. 86–106.

Cogie, Jane. "Theory Made Visible: How Tutoring May Effect Development of Student-Centered Teachers." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1997, pp. 76–84.

Garcia de Mueller, Genevieve. and Iris Ruiz. "Race, Silence, and Writing Program Administration: A Qualitative Study of U.S. College Writing Programs." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2016, pp. 19–39.

Grabe, William. "Narrative and Expository Macrogenres." *Genre in the Classroom: Multiple Perspectives*, edited by Ann M. Johns, Routledge, 2001, pp. 249–67.

Jolliffe, David A. "Learning to Read as Continuing Education." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 58, no. 3, 2007, pp. 470–94.

Kearns, Michael. "The Composition Teacher-Scholar in the New University." *ADE Bulletin*, vol. 137, Spring 2005, pp. 50–56.

Koster Tarvers, Josephine and Cindy Moore. *Teaching in Progress: Theories, Practices, and Scenarios*. 3rd ed. Pearson-Longman, 2008.

Krebs, Paula. "One of Each: The Small College Multi-plex English Department." *ADE Bulletin*, vol. 137, Spring 2005, pp. 67–69.

Latterell, Catherine G. "Training the Workforce: An Overview of GTA Educational Curricula." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1996, pp. 7–23.

Lindemann, Erika. "No Place for Literature." *College English*, vol. 55, no. 3, 1993, pp. 311–16.

—. *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*. 4th ed. Oxford UP, 2001.

Mapes, Aimee C., Brad Jacobson, Rachel LaMance, and Stefan M. Vogel "Troublesome Knowledge: A Study of GTA Ambivalence with Genre-Informed Pedagogy" *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2020, pp. 66–88.

Mastrangelo, Lisa and Sharon Decker. "When Literature Faculty Members Must Teach Composition: The Need for Chair-Director Collaboration." *ADE Bulletin*, vol. 158, 2020, pp. 59–70.

National Census of Writing. "What Percentage of Sections of Face-to-Face FYC Were Taught by FT, Tenure-line Faculty in the English Department?" *National Census of Writing*, 2017. https://writingcensus.ucsd.edu/survey/4/

year/2017?question_name=s4y2017fyw22&op=Submit#results. accessed 23 July 2023.

—. "What Types of Initial Training is Provided?" *National Census of Writing*, 2017. https://writingcensus.ucsd.edu/survey/4/year/2017?question_name=s4y2017fyw22&op=Submit#results. accessed 23 July 2023.

Nicholas, Melissa. "Not Sure Where to Start? A Simple Instrument for Beginning Writing Program Assessment" *Journal of College Writing*, vol. 11, 2014, pp. 11–32.

Odom, Mary Lou. "Not Just for Writing Anymore: What WAC Can Teach Us About Reading to Learn." *Across the Disciplines*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2013, https://wac.colostate.edu/atd/reading/odom.cfm. Accessed 3 January 2022.

Pytlik, Betsy P. and Sarah Liggett, eds. *Preparing College Teachers of Writing: Histories, Theories, Programs, Practices.* Oxford UP, 2002.

Smit, David. "Curriculum Design for First-Year Writing Program." *The Allyn and Bacon Sourcebook for Writing Program Administrators*, edited by Irene Ward and William J. Carpenter, Longman, 2008, pp.185–206.

Sullivan, Patrick. "What Can We Learn about 'College-Level' Writing from Basic Writing Students? The Importance of Reading." *What is "College-Level" Writing? Volume 2*, edited by Patrick Sullivan, Howard Tinberg, and Sheridan Blau, NCTE, 2010, pp. 233–53.

Tate, Gary. "A Place for Literature in Freshman Composition." *College English*, vol. 55, no. 3, 1993, pp. 317–21.

Tremmel, Robert. "Seeking a Balanced Discipline: Writing Teacher Education in First-Year Composition and English Education." *English Education*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2001, pp. 6–30.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake. "The Professionalization of TA Development Programs: A Heuristic for Curriculum Design." Pytlik and Liggett, pp. 63–-74.

Liberty Kohn's interests are genre theory, rhetoric of social class, trust and emotion in public writing, and misinformation studies. He teaches courses in public writing, technical writing, and digital rhetoric at Winona State University. Kohn has directed the writing center, founded a WAC program, and chaired all-university Faculty Development at Winona State. His scholarship has appeared in the collections *Class in the Composition Classroom* (Utah State UP, 2017) and *Teaching Literature with Digital Technology: Assignments* (Bedford, 2016) as well as the *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, *Composition Forum*, *Journal of Working Class Studies*, *Journal of Interdisciplinary Humanities*, *Journal of Language Literacy and Education*, *Technoculture*, and more.