

Teaching Writing in the Community College Implications for English Faculty and Community Colleges

Purpose Statement

English departments and faculty in community colleges traditionally have been dedicated to providing instruction of the highest quality in the teaching of writing. This commitment to excellence is increasingly more complex and more challenging due to the growing heterogeneity of the student population, the increasing demand for developmental instruction, and the expanding skills requirements in the workplace. The acquisition of writing skills is fundamental to the persistence and success of college students if they are to achieve their academic and career goals.

Because community colleges properly serve as the gateway of educational opportunity open to all students, English faculty are challenged to keep abreast of the latest instructional methodologies necessary to meet the diverse learning needs and styles of their student populations. In addition, community college faculty are faced with an explosion of electronic media which presents new challenges and opportunities for the delivery of instruction via rapidly changing technology. Further, faculty in writing programs are held publicly accountable for preparing their students well for the changing needs and expectations of today's workplace.

Therefore, making careful evaluations and determining priorities on behalf of students and the discipline require an increased knowledge of effective pedagogies for diverse learners, of new technology for instructional delivery and research, and of a curriculum responsive to learners and community needs as well as an understanding of how each relates to the discipline, to higher education, and to external political and business trends. Thus, in order to understand and practice the English discipline today, a broad knowledge base and a wide range of skills not previously expected of writing faculty are necessary if students are to be well served.

ECCTYC/TYCA-Pacific Coast believes that a statement of professional standards is important because of the centrality of the English departments and faculty in facilitating the acquisition of college-level writing skills for students' success in college and the workplace. This document first suggests basic assumptions of teaching writing in the community college regarding the role of community colleges and the nature of their students, the changing curriculum and pedagogy, and the consequent expanded role of English faculty. These assumptions have significant implications for the teaching and learning of writing. The document then focuses on the importance of the teaching/learning environment in terms of (1) conditions for successful learning experiences for students, (2) qualities of effective teachers and teaching, and (3) characteristics of institutional support that contribute to quality teaching and to a positive learning environment for students.

ECCTYC is committed to updating this document on a regular basis to provide a statement of professional standards for English faculty, college administrators, and visiting accrediting teams to use in assessing the quality and effectiveness of English programs.

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Basic Assumptions

This document is predicated on certain basic assumptions about the nature of community colleges and the teaching of writing in the community college setting:

The Role of Community Colleges and the Nature of Their Students

- Community colleges are in a unique position to respond to changing needs of their diverse student populations, whether they are transfer, vocational, second language, or special needs students, and to prepare them for further academic studies, for the workplace, and for living in a democratic society.
- The student population has become increasingly heterogeneous and is often academically under prepared. The majority of college-bound students requiring basic writing skills attend community colleges, and effective teaching and learning can provide them with writing skills to succeed in higher education.
- Community colleges serve as an educational gateway for increasing numbers of students with special needs and for whom English is a second or third language, and community colleges provide these students with effective instruction.
- Community college students benefit from supportive learning environments and effective supplemental resources designed to meet their unique needs.

The Changing Curriculum and Pedagogy

- The institutional paradigm shift from a teaching-centered to a learning-centered classroom has challenged traditional methods of teaching writing.
- Current writing theory focuses attention on the writing process and the social context of language, emphasizing the importance of one-on-one instruction for students as they learn to revise multiple drafts and write for a variety of purposes.
- Critical reading and critical thinking are essential components in all college curricula, and especially in composition

courses.

- The explosion in educational technology is having and will continue to have a dramatic impact on pedagogy and on modes of delivery in teaching composition.
- Because the expectations of academic institutions and the workplace are constantly changing, systematic and ongoing needs assessment is essential to providing a responsive curriculum that prepares students for the academic and the work environments.
- Research provides useful information about curriculum, teaching effectiveness, assessment of students' skills, placement, and monitoring of student academic progress.

The Expanded Role of Writing Faculty

- The need for English instructors to remain current in the latest pedagogies and methodologies in learning theory and in the teaching of writing makes it necessary for English faculty to engage actively in continuous professional development.
- Faculty's need for more instructional equipment and specialized training will continue to increase, and the demand for more technological knowledge will challenge faculty as they plan curriculum and facilities for new learning environments.
- Increasingly, faculty are expected to serve as role models and mentors for students served by writing programs, including nontraditional students, students from specifically identified demographic groups, and students in learning communities and specially articulated programs.

Successful Learning Experiences for Students

If students in community colleges are to have learning experiences that will enable them to achieve their college, workplace, and personal goals, they need to be ensured of the following:

A Sequenced Developmental Curriculum

English programs which provide access to sequenced developmental courses appropriate to students' entry level skills and which are designed to help them progressively acquire these skills in preparation for college level coursework are essential to the success of community college students.

In order to benefit from a developmental writing program, students need a valid and reliable procedure for assessment, placement and monitoring of academic progress. The involvement of writing faculty in the selection and implementation of appropriate assessment instruments, in monitoring the research necessary for reliability and validity, in matching the skills levels with the curriculum, and in monitoring student progress will ensure that students have a fair and accurate matriculation process and a sound curriculum.

A Competitive Transfer Program

Students will benefit from an English transfer curriculum that offers them a range of courses and that prepares them for upper division work in colleges and universities. They are entitled to transfer courses with the academic integrity and necessary rigor to be recognized as equivalent to corresponding courses at other institutions of higher education.

Essential Language Skills for the Workplace

Students benefit from an English curriculum that prepares them with reading and writing skills to succeed in the workplace, especially the ability to obtain, evaluate, organize, analyze and communicate information effectively.

Supportive Instructors

Students benefit from English instructors who are informed by current writing and learning theory, who use innovative and student-centered methodologies, who are responsive to a variety of learning styles, and who are sensitive to the culturally diverse backgrounds of their student populations.

Responding to students' individual learning needs has a significant impact on the acquisition of writing skills. Community college students need both help in mastering skills and encouragement as they pursue their goals. Students are more successful when they receive personal attention and individualized responses to their learning needs.

Effective Learning Resources

Community colleges admit students with diverse academic goals and educational needs, many of whom need special help. All students are entitled to a supportive environment and a full range of academic counseling and institutional support services that will improve their chances for success.

Writing students, many of whom are developmental writers and/or second language students, have special needs for support services such as tutoring, computer labs, computer assisted instruction, study groups, and other services with accessible trained staff to help them. Increasingly, student retention and academic achievement have improved as these services have become institutionalized components of college writing programs through establishment of comprehensive writing centers, where additional assignment-related discussion and directed practice are provided by professional tutors in a

non-classroom setting.

Access to Technology and Research

The efficient use of research tools has become essential in the current information age. Whether students are seeking information for academic purposes, workplace requirements, or personal goals, they need the skills to obtain a variety of kinds of information. Students need to know how to access information using technology, how to evaluate their expanding sources of information, and how to document appropriately.

Unfortunately, the technological revolution has created a disparity: too often, access to computers in American schools and homes is based on socio-economic factors. Thus access to computers and training in their use are particularly important to community college students, many of whom have not had the opportunity to gain computer competency. Those students who do come from well-equipped high schools and homes should expect a similar level of technology at the community colleges.

Whenever possible, students should be able to access college information resources from off-campus using technology. This access is especially important for students who are facing challenges of disabilities and distance that make on-campus access difficult.

Students also should have the benefit of instruction that is enhanced by technology. They need classrooms and labs equipped for a variety of delivery methods that take into account new pedagogies and student learning styles.

Qualities of Effective Teachers and Teaching

As English faculty in community colleges respond to the increasing needs of their students, and to their own growing understanding of the complexity and extent of those needs, they face higher expectations and demands from their students, their colleagues across the disciplines, their administrations, and the public. Students and others in the communities served by community colleges expect English faculty to be well prepared to help both their traditional and non-traditional students succeed in writing courses. In order to provide students with successful learning experiences, writing faculty are committed to:

Creating Student-Centered Classrooms

Students benefit from student-centered classrooms which actively engage them in the learning process. Teachers who understand that their students have varying abilities and learning styles use a variety of delivery modes to help students be successful by responding to the individual learning needs of their students. For that reason, it is important that faculty strive to keep abreast of current research and pedagogy in order to incorporate new strategies which develop from a growing understanding of the learning process and the teaching of writing.

Developing Responsive Curriculum

Community college students with their range of abilities challenge departments to build carefully sequenced developmental programs as well as to provide competitive transfer courses. Maintaining course integrity by determining entrance and exit standards and by maintaining consistency in course content and grading throughout the department ensures equal treatment of students and is essential to a sound writing program. English faculty have the responsibility of ongoing evaluation of curriculum in order to meet the changing academic and workplace needs of students. Consequently, faculty responsibility extends to all aspects of college writing programs, including course content, the course sequence, prerequisites, assessment, placement, and grading standards. Sound curriculum development also requires the understanding of practices that reflect the current research and pedagogy of the discipline, of state community college requirements and intersegmental issues, and of articulation agreements with other two-year and four-year institutions.

Using Technology Meaningfully

Technology, in its multiple forms, is changing every aspect of the professional lives of English instructors and the ways that they teach. If writing faculty are to continue to provide excellence in instruction, they must be involved in exploring and evaluating the effectiveness of new technologies and software resources as they apply to the curriculum and delivery systems. English faculty are challenged to assess new pedagogies and modes of delivery and to use emerging technologies if they want to help writing students master the computer skills they need in an information age.

Encouraging and promoting courses and programs that provide students with access to computers and that help them develop computer skills is essential in the community college where many students have not had the opportunity to develop the skills that they will need in college and the workplace.

English faculty, in collaboration with library faculty, have an increasing responsibility to help students gather information, develop research skills, use electronic data bases and the Internet, evaluate sources, and document materials. Important too is the need for creating outreach opportunities with students and communities through technology, particularly in implementing successful online instruction.

Recognizing the Importance of Research

Well-designed educational research can inform classroom practices, contribute to program success, and direct institutional policies. Current technology provides a significant tool for gaining important information to aid in evaluation of curriculum,

writing programs, and classroom practices and to plan for the future. It also allows for measuring student success and monitoring individual students' progress. English faculty benefit by understanding and using the resources of educational research.

Participating in Professional Activities

Effective professionals accept the responsibility of contributing to their institutions in activities such as reviewing writing programs, developing curriculum, and serving on department and college committees, especially in matters pertaining to the effectiveness of the English program. In a discipline as dynamic as the teaching of writing, writing faculty must maintain currency in theory and practice through attending workshops and conferences. Another important aspect of professional life is communicating with colleagues at professional meetings, presenting at conferences, and supporting professional organizations.

Building Strong Departments

English departments are changing dramatically as a result of growth positions and retirements, and thus English faculty are challenged to build departments of effective teachers who can engage in collegial decision making. They are further challenged to develop hiring policies that ensure quality teaching and hiring practices that reflect the diversity of their institutions.

The extensive use of part-time faculty places added responsibilities on English departments and their faculty. Though English departments cannot determine policies concerning salary and benefits, they can support efforts to obtain parity for adjunct faculty, including paid office hours to provide for student interaction. English departments can also participate in hiring adjunct faculty, in providing adjunct faculty with staff development opportunities, and in extending professional support. In order to ensure students consistent course instruction and grading standards, it is essential that English departments communicate department standards and expectations to adjunct faculty and provide them with the necessary professional support.

Institutional Support for Teaching and Learning

An institutional commitment to providing quality writing instruction means a commitment to providing the resources necessary for instructor and student success and the establishment of a working relationship with writing faculty that is based on mutual respect. The following standards identify institutional practices that support these goals:

Supportive Teaching and Learning Environment

Institutions contribute to an optimum environment for the effective teaching and learning of writing skills when they provide writing instructors and students with up-to-date, reliable, routinely serviced equipment in classrooms, instructor offices, campus media centers, computer labs and writing centers. Institutions enable students to acquire necessary academic and occupational research skills by maintaining well-staffed libraries that offer up-to-date research resources and tools, provide bibliographic instruction, and have accessible hours to accommodate students with flexible scheduling needs.

Effective Research Practices

Institutions support faculty and students in writing programs when they provide ongoing research for validating assessment and placement instruments, for determining success rates through a sequenced curriculum, for planning and reviewing curriculum effectiveness, for assessing pedagogical and curriculum innovation, and for determining student satisfaction.

Conditions that Promote Teaching and Learning

Institutions recognize the importance of student writing skill acquisition for college success by providing conditions that recognize the increasing demands on writing instructors and that enhance instructors' ability to meet the needs of today's students using current pedagogy. Supportive institutions recognize that students benefit from increased interaction with instructors and special attention to individual writing problems and work to ensure optimum conditions for facilitating this type of student-teacher interaction.

Supportive institutions demonstrate a commitment to strategies that encourage integration and development of writing skills collegewide, such as writing across the curriculum, service learning and interdisciplinary courses. In addition, these institutions demonstrate a commitment to student success by developing, funding, and adequately staffing support services by which students can receive assistance with their writing beyond that which occurs in class, such as computer-assisted labs, writing centers, tutors, online tutorials, and study groups.

Collegial Approach to Collaboration

Supportive institutions call on and respect faculty expertise to formulate appropriate and timely responses to demographic changes, changes in transfer expectations, changing technology and workplace demands. When institutions work in an atmosphere of mutual respect with writing faculty to meet state mandates and institutional goals, the college and students benefit.

Supportive institutions recognize that writing faculty are uniquely positioned to determine the curriculum needs of their students and the best materials to meet those needs. These institutions support innovative efforts by faculty, such as development of interdisciplinary courses, establishment of learning communities and service learning opportunities, and

design of technology mediated instruction in both on-campus and on-line classes.

Assurance of Program Integrity

Students and departments benefit when institutions work with writing faculty to promote the integrity of the writing program through a number of means, such as demonstrating a commitment to full-time hiring, allocating space and resources, supporting faculty orientation and/or mentoring efforts, and providing for flexibility in scheduling.

Meaningful Professional Development Opportunities

Institutions demonstrate their awareness that composition is a rapidly developing field by providing training and professional development opportunities to help instructors keep current with methodology and theory in the teaching of writing. Institutions maintain excellence in instruction and ensure that instructors stay professionally current by providing conference funds and qualified substitutes for both-full time and adjunct writing faculty to attend conferences and workshops sponsored by professional organizations, both in their discipline and in related disciplines.

Institutions enable their writing instructors to stay technologically current in their methodology by ensuring that writing instructors receive the appropriate educational technology training and by providing them with the access to this educational technology for instructional purposes.

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A Position Statement
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