Chapter 13

Reshaping Institutional Mission: OWI and Writing Program Administration

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the relationship between online writing instruction (OWI) and the material and pedagogical impacts of OWI on institutions and their missions, using the author’s regional campus to illustrate those impacts. First, the chapter explores the institutional mission and context of the author’s institution, exploring how OWI works with and against the university’s mission and how the growth of online instruction reshapes that mission. Second, the chapter asserts the need for professional development by exploring campus-wide resources for instructor training and then by detailing the writing program’s efforts to provide discipline-specific training that emphasizes pedagogy and collaboration. Finally, the chapter asserts that writing program administrators are uniquely situated stakeholders on their campuses who can make a significant impact on the implementation and ongoing development of OWI on their campuses.

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, Indiana University Southeast, a regional commuter campus in the greater Louisville metropolitan area, installed a new chancellor who has taken the helm at a moment when the university faces declines in all the numbers that are crucial for the ongoing vitality of the institution: enrollment, revenues from tuition, and state appropriations. In his Installation Address in December 2014, Chancellor Ray Wallace asserted: “We will need to change our philosophy about how we serve our students. We will have to become more customer savvy about how and when we educate.” In his description of the kinds of philosophical changes the campus would need to make, the incoming chancellor noted that “hybrid classes and totally digital classes, programs and degrees must be the order of the day. We will need to bring our programs to the students who want them, whether digitally or face to face.” Demonstrating that moving toward online courses, whether in hybrid or fully online forms, has indeed become the “order of the day,” Chancellor Wallace informed faculty and staff during his 2015 State of the Campus that our campus has seen a 455% increase in online student credit hours since 2012, in contrast to the university system’s overall increase of 85%.

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In a symposium on MOOCs published in College Composition and Communication, Jeff Rice (2013) writes, “Despite the persistent critiques, distance learning still hasn’t destroyed face-to-face interaction or education. It has been with us for some time” (p. 697). Similarly, Courtney Adams Wooten (2013) argues, “Correspondence study has often been overlooked as a precursor to online distance education” (p. 40). Jason Allen Snart (2010) asserts that distance education has always been tied to advances in technology, “including the development of first the postal system, then radio and later video communications, and now the Internet” (p. 59). These reminders that MOOCs and other forms of online education are in many ways a continuation of distance education rather than an entirely new phenomenon are an important counterpoint to consider in light of the steep increase of online course offerings at my institution and at other institutions globally.

However, even as online education functions within the broader historical context of distance education, as a writing program administrator (WPA), I see significant philosophical, logistical, and material challenges in such a significant shift from face-to-face (f2f) instruction to online instruction for my campus. In this chapter, I examine the relationship between online writing instruction (OWI) and the material and pedagogical impacts of OWI on a regional campus, asserting that as WPA, it is my responsibility to direct the increased implementation of OWI with an eye toward maintaining sustainable labor practices for faculty, especially the many part-time instructors who teach the majority of our writing courses, and toward meeting the specific needs of our student population. First, I examine the institutional mission of IU Southeast, exploring how OWI works with and against our mission and how the growth of online instruction reshapes our mission. Second, I move from mission to professional development by exploring campus-wide resources for instructor training and then by detailing the writing program’s efforts to provide discipline-specific training that emphasizes pedagogy and collaboration. Finally, I assert that WPAs are uniquely situated stakeholders on their campuses who can make a significant impact on the implementation and ongoing development of OWI on their campuses.

INSTITUTIONAL MISSION, ONLINE EDUCATION, AND REVENUE

Founded in 1941, Indiana University Southeast has for the majority of its history been a commuter campus, serving a student population comprised primarily of adult students, most of whom work 20 to 40 hours per week. As a regional campus in a metropolitan area, IU Southeast’s main focus has been to provide an affordable comprehensive undergraduate education, offering only a few graduate programs in business and education. However, as socioeconomic conditions have changed in southern Indiana and the greater Louisville metropolitan area (affectionately referred to as Kentuckiana or Inducky), the student population at IU Southeast (comprised of roughly 6,000 undergraduates and 1,000 graduate students) has become increasingly traditional, with a significantly higher percentage of students falling in the 18-22 age category than in previous decades. As slow economic growth eases many of the financial difficulties brought about by the Great Recession of the late 2000s, IU Southeast faces declining enrollments among non-traditional students as its traditional-aged population increases—although not enough to compensate for the loss of the former population. Nothing reflects this change in the university’s demographics than the construction of five residence halls on campus in 2007 and 2008; prior to that time, no students lived on campus, but now approximately 10% of enrolled students live on campus, with university administration pushing for the funding of more residence halls. In short, the university is experiencing remarkable changes that in many ways mirror challenges and shifts that most colleges and