Chapter 10
Appropriating Zoom to Provide Access to One-to-One Writing Support

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the design and deployment of online writing centers (OWCs) to cater to the evolving needs of diverse undergraduate and graduate student populations. Leveraging platforms such as ZOOM, OWCs provide effective writing support, especially for individuals facing challenges with in-person services. The chapter discusses the historical integration of technology in writing centers, writing center pedagogy, and highlights ZOOM's pedagogical benefits. It also emphasizes the significance of webforms for streamlining administrative processes and supporting self-regulated learning. Insights regarding how to engage students in writing consultations are discussed alongside the evaluation of the effectiveness of OWCs in beta testing. The purpose of the chapter is to empower educators in establishing OWCs in their contexts, which are tailored to promote accessibility and effective online learning for their students.

INTRODUCTION

University writing centers are growing in number as institutions around the world respond to the needs of a diverse variety of undergraduate and graduate students who need support with writing assignments. These students include mature students returning to education, students who did not have access to writing center support in high school, and students who use English as an additional language in English-medium instruction programs. To better serve such students, writing centers have evolved and incorporated technology to enhance tutorial pedagogical practices and offer greater access to learning resources. Recent technological advances, coupled with the need to offer remote learning during the pandemic, have enabled educators to offer synchronous online writing center support services using videoconferencing applications such as ZOOM. These developments have also enabled writing centers

to offer greater access to writing support for individuals who have difficulty engaging with writing center tutors in person (Hughes, 2015). For instance, students who reside far from campus, work full-time, are primary caretakers, or have disabilities can now benefit from remote writing support.

This chapter outlines the rationale and decision-making that should inform the design of an online writing center (OWC). To accomplish this, the evolution of writing centers and their use of technology is outlined to provide context for the discussion of OWCs. Then, pedagogical approaches utilized by OWCs and how ZOOM can be appropriated for pedagogic purposes to provide academic support to students are discussed. The subsequent sections delve into the implications of the technology for tutor and administrative staff training. Lastly, insights from the beta testing of an OWC are presented with student feedback about its utility. Principally, the chapter aims to increase educators' awareness and understanding of the issues connected with creating an OWC so that they can develop their own OWC with pedagogical and operational practices appropriate for their context.

The Evolution of Writing Centers

The evolution of writing centers in higher education is marked by significant pedagogical shifts. In their early incarnation, writing centers served primarily remedial functions, offering support to students who struggled with writing (Carino, 1995). However, the landscape of writing instruction underwent a profound transformation in the 1970s and 1980s. This period was marked by a shift towards a more holistic approach to writing, through initiatives across the curriculum that advocated for the integration of writing instruction into all academic disciplines. The evolution continued into the 1980s and 1990s, with writing centers further refining their pedagogical rationale, moving from a product-oriented to a process-oriented focus (Harris, 1990). This era underscored the understanding of writing as a continuous process, a perspective that has informed the instructional practices in writing centers ever since.

Due to the widespread adoption of technology in many societies, OWC services have evolved significantly over the past two decades. For example, Hughes (2015) chronicles the origins of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's OWC dating back to 1995. More recently, a survey by Purdue University showed that 94.9% of US universities provide writing center services online (Denny, 2021). The growth of OWCs has been driven by various socio-technological factors, such as the increasing popularity of online learning, the need for flexibility and accessibility (Martinez, 2015; Miley, 2013), and the development and use of technology that can be harnessed to improve the quality of writing tutorials.

OWCs are now an integral part of many universities' support systems for students, especially those studying remotely or who cannot visit the on-campus writing center. As technology has advanced, OWCs have evolved to offer a variety of online services. Initially, asynchronous services such as email-based tutoring and electronic document exchanging were available, but these services had limitations as they lacked the spontaneity and interactivity of face-to-face interactions. However, with the development of collaborative file editing applications such as Google Docs, synchronous text-based tutorials became possible. In addition, the widespread use of virtual tutorials with video and document sharing capabilities has been made possible by increases in bandwidth technology and the creation of reliable videoconferencing applications such as Skype (Raign, 2013).

Next, to contextualize the OWC literature and offer a clearer perspective on the subject, an overview of the theories and practices related to writing center tutoring is given.

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