**Not for the Kids: Writing Support that Works for Adult Learners**

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Resources developed with traditional students in mind rarely work as well for adult learners. Starting with the understanding that every writer struggles, we developed five non-course-based initiatives to support our adult student writers. As we describe and assess the impact of these initiatives, we also demonstrate the need for writing support focused on adult learners.

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Every writer struggles with writing at some point. This is particularly the case when one is learning to write in a new context. At DePaul University's School for New Learning (SNL), we see adults who are successful writers at work, but who present as basic writers in school. We also see students who produce well-written, thesis-driven final essays in our writing classes, but who submit disorganized papers in their research methods course. Melissa Faulkner has made clear that it is not only adults, but

> all students [who] are or become basic writers. Whether it is a first-year student in need of a grammar review before entering composition, a sophomore encountering a new genre in a general education course, or a junior encountering the vocabulary and conventions of his or her discipline for the first time, all students need writing remediation at various times during their academic journeys. (45)

As a result, at SNL, we treat all students as writers who sometimes struggle. We do this for two reasons. First, as Faulkner argued, we know that basic writing is not a stage to be gotten through, but a recurring condition for experimenting writers who push into new genres and contexts. We also know that our students do not know this. Instead, many return to school with considerable

anxiety about writing (Navarre Cleary, "Anxiety" 364). Second, we know that adults are most likely to persist in school if they have early evidence that they will succeed (Kasworm 30; Castles 176; Smith 76-77). Labeling students as "basic writers" only strengthens their fear that they cannot, in their words, "do school." Instead, we want to communicate to our adult learners that, like writers everywhere, they will struggle, but they can master academic writing.

To be clear, we are not dismissing basic writing, but we are dismissing the idea that it is only for some students some of the time. Instead, we have developed several initiatives to support adults when they struggle with writing at any point in their studies. Navarre Cleary's "How Antonio Graduated on Out of Here" describes a course we developed for this purpose. Here, we present five non-course-based initiatives designed for our adult student writers: a website, in-person writing "boot camps," a college month of writing, online writing hangouts, and writing webinars. We explain the reasons each was developed and how it works, assess its strengths and limitations, and report on our lessons learned.

**Our Context**

As an adult-serving college for students over 24, we strive to meet students where they are. Where they are not is in dorms or are at a point in their lives when school is their primary focus. Instead, they attend class at night and on weekends, and sometimes from their kitchen table. They study on their lunch hour or after they put their kids to bed. Many have written more reports for bosses than for teachers. They come from a wide variety of educational backgrounds, have rich life experiences, and are highly motivated to succeed.

SNL has just over 1,000 students enrolled in Bachelor of Arts degree programs and over 100 students enrolled in Master's programs. In fall 2016, 88% of students were part-time, 59% were women, 54% identified as students of color, and 50% were between the ages of 30 and 44.

The average student is in her mid-30s, attends school part-time, works full-time, cares for her family, and already has about 50 hours of college credit, but is not transferring directly from another college. She prefers evening or weekend classes, but also takes about half of her classes online because of her busy schedule.  Most of her classmates, even those who are fully online, live in the Chicagoland area, but some live in other states and a few in other countries.

All SNL programs are writing intensive with papers, journals, portfolios, or other writing projects dominating the means of assessment. Students write for classes, to gain credit through prior learning assessment (PLA), and to report on their learning in independent studies and capstone projects. Writing to describe, compare, and analyze experience occurs across the curriculum because of the college's emphasis on experiential learning.

Many of the faculty who teach in this applied liberal arts curriculum are practicing professionals and part-time instructors. While experts in their fields, they have little to no training on how to help students become stronger writers. We have done significant faculty development work over the last decade. However, when we began these efforts, the majority of faculty relied upon high-stakes, final research papers, with little to no scaffolding, to assess learning. At the same time, a survey of students indicated that over half had not completed a research paper in the previous ten years. Not surprisingly, faculty were dismayed by the results and unsure how to help students. As a result, the college's 2005-2006 annual plan identified the need to "significantly strengthen support for students and faculty in the improvement of student writing" (School for New Learning 2). The college hired a tenure-track faculty member to lead this work, and the college's adult-learner focused writing program began.

Over the last decade, DePaul University's Writing Center has also made significant strides in its outreach to adult students. Today, more adults use the Writing Center than ever

before. However, it remains primarily focused on the younger, full-time students who are the majority in the university. For example, while adults attend classes year-round and do much of their coursework on evenings and weekends, the only Writing Center hours in the summer of 2017 were from 10 am to 5 pm on Mondays through Thursdays. The Writing Center has added online tutoring and feedback by email, both of which have benefited our students. Unfortunately, the Writing Center can only staff these services during their regular hours when most of our students are at work.

Like support for basic writing, support for adult learners is often hard to find and easy to lose, particularly at institutions that focus on "traditional" students. As a result, those of us working with adults become skilled at flying under the radar, supporting our students in ways that work for them without requiring much of the larger institution. Each of the five initiatives discussed below is an example of this kind of locally sourced and targeted support. The first illustrates both some of the opportunities and the risks of such initiatives.

**The Writing Guide for SNL Students Website by Michelle Navarre Cleary**

In 2005, I was the director of the SNL writing program and its only full-time faculty member. Anything new that I developed had to be something that I could maintain in addition to what I was already doing as a tenure-track faculty member. My interviews and focus groups with students and faculty made clear that both would benefit from easily accessible guidance on where to find writing help online, a statement of expectations for writing at the college, and sample assignments. Students needed resources at night and on the weekends when they tend to do most of their writing. Just-in-time information is particularly crucial for adults who have many other demands upon their time. We want them to be able to answer writing-related questions in the moment so that they keep writing. Faculty, particularly part-time faculty, wanted

a clear statement of the college's expectations for student writing as well as resources to which they could easily direct students.

Our students were accustomed to turning to the Internet for information and help. Seventy percent of those surveyed reported that they used the Internet to answer a question or find information 16 times or more a week. Most were already looking online for help with writing, focusing in particular on how to support claims and incorporate sources in their writing.

Analysis of writing logs showed that our students also struggled with managing the writing process. Most students did not use strategies for organizing their ideas. Instead, they jumped quickly from a topic idea to long hours of research to finally writing shortly before their papers were due. Invariably, they reported feeling frustrated and found the first draft the most stressful and painful part of the process. On the other hand, they reported being happiest when working with others. The website sought to address the needs and strengths identified in this initial assessment, including references to online resources for collaboration and tutoring and a large section on how to navigate the writing process, organize ideas, and work with sources.

The resulting *Writing Guide for SNL Students* included a home page and seven sections: a statement of the program's values and goals, a Q&A page on writing course options, a help page with annotated links to resources, a set of writing process pages, the Grading Rubric for Papers at SNL, an annual showcase of outstanding writing, and sample papers. The home page included videos of SNL students and faculty discussing their writing and writing process. Embedded in the middle of the homepage was a blog that allowed us to share current information and timely tips with students. Of these sections, the three that students found most useful were those on writing process, the paper rubric, and the sample papers.

The writing process section used the concept of a toolbox to offer students multiple tools or strategies for inventing, organizing, drafting, revising, and editing their papers. The toolboxes aimed to leverage the best of what is on the web and to provide guidance specific to the college's context. For example, figure 1 shows the first page of the revising toolbox.

Because so many of our students assume that, if they cannot write a good paper in one sitting, they cannot write, this section stressed the importance of revision as a crucial part of the writing process. In addition to the toolbox, it included a comparison of how novices and experts approach revision based upon the works of



Fig. 1. Revising Toolbox, page 1, from "Revising." *Writing Guide for SNL Students,* DePaul University, 2015, snlapps.depaul.edu/writing/revisingtoolkit.html.

Sommers and Perl. It also included "Real Writers in Action," a series of illustrated accounts of four writers' processes designed by then graduate student Joe Hemmerling. These illustrations

stressed the many different ways individuals work through the writing process. See figure 2 for

one example.

Another frequently visited page, the "Grading Rubric for Papers at SNL," was designed
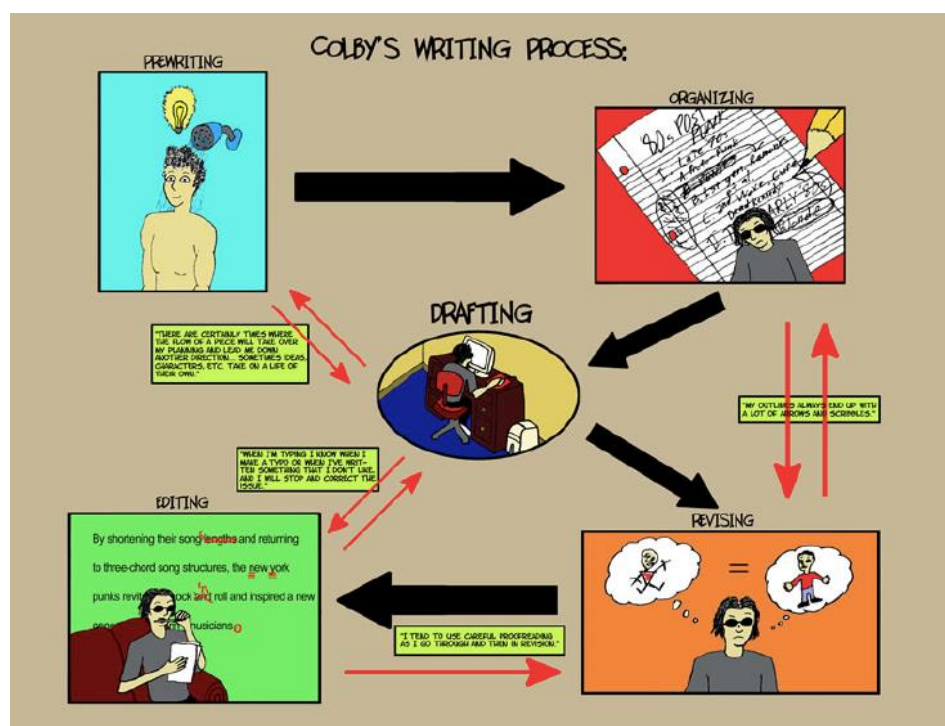


Fig. 2. "Real Writers in Action: Colby's Writing Process." *Writing Guide for SNL Students*, DePaul University, 2015, snlapps.depaul.edu/writing/Colby.html.

to help students understand teacher expectations and to help teachers be consistent in their

assessment of student writing. It linked key terms on the rubric to explanations such as that for

"thesis" in figure 3. The rubric was developed with input from faculty across the curriculum,

then refined in consultation with and finally approved by the college's Assessment Committee.

This process surfaced differing assumptions about writing that the faculty were able to talk

through.

Fig. 3. Portion of the grading rubric, from "Grading Rubric for Papers at the School for New Learning." *Writing Guide for SNL Students*, DePaul University, 2015, snlapps.depaul.edu/writing/Rubric.html

While the writing process and paper rubric sections of the website were well used, by far the most visited section and the one students most frequently cited as useful was "SNL Assignments." This section provided students with guidance on the most common writing assignments at the college, including descriptions and examples, some with annotations. It included faculty comments about these assignments as well as more general writing guidance. For example, here are a few comments on a learning journal assignment:

- "In this paragraph, Brian is beginning to address the criteria of [the assignment] that asks him to show how he used the Kolb learning cycle."

- "The externship journal is an unusual academic writing assignment that does not require the formal style of most of your college papers. Because this is a journal and the goal is to record your thoughts in the moment, you can use informal language and do not need to follow all of the conventions of grammar."

- "The transitions in this paragraph indicate sequence: "First... then... then...." The transitions help to keep each step distinct from the preceding one."

(Navarre Cleary et al. 1, 17, 12)

Interestingly, this was also the portion of the website that generated the most faculty push back. Some faculty objected to posting papers that were less than perfect, others objected to papers that were too perfect, and still others objected to the idea of offering students any examples, arguing that doing so would stifle creativity. These objections largely, but never fully, dissipated after I shared research on the value of models for writing, assured faculty that students would see a variety of examples, and gave faculty the opportunity to discuss their expectations with each other.

In sum, the *Writing Guide* sought to provide students with a clearer understanding of what they were being asked to do (through descriptions and annotated examples), why they should bother to do it (through quotes and eventually videos from peers and professors), how to do it (through discussions of the writing process and requirements), and where to go for additional help (through a curated collection of annotated links). During user testing, a student enthused that "having all of this information in one place is a huge time saver, it's like a bible for SNL students."  Faculty also appreciated the availability of a clear set of common expectations and writing models as they advised, assigned, and evaluated student writing. The website helped

faculty stay focused on using writing as a tool for learning rather than on learning how to teach writing.

The site was used by a total of 26,943 people. Between January 2009 and February 2016, when the site was replaced, it was visited 58,737 times, averaging 683 visits per month. Over half were returning visitors. While the site attracted users from around the world, most were from communities served by the college. These local visitors stayed the longest on the site, averaging over three minutes per visit.

Over time, the material on the site grew, particularly with the addition of several videos and sample papers. By 2015, ten years after it was initially launched, the site was ready for a major overhaul. While we had kept links up to date, we did not regularly cull the resources. As a result, the site needed pruning so that it did not overwhelm users with an avalanche of resources. It also needed a design refresh that would make it more visually appealing, more accessible, and mobile compatible. At the same time, the site, which was being hosted on a university server but was not part of the university website, had caught the attention of the university's webmasters.

After the site was moved to the college's official SharePoint website, many of its features were lost or buried. For example, instead of one click on the paper rubric to get an explanation of a key term, users now need to click on each ranking to get the list of criteria defining that ranking (see fig. 4). If any of the terms in the criteria are unclear, they can click again on "the SNL Paper Rubric Explanations" where they may or may not find the term. If they find it, they must click a third time for an explanation. The only students likely to follow this trail of links are those looking to procrastinate. Data confirms that users do not find the SharePoint site as useful as the previous site. Page views are down from an average of 683 to 285 per month. Returning visitors

have declined from 54% to 27% of the users, and the time users stay on a page has dropped by

over half to 1.09 minutes



Fig.4. Portion of rubric on new SharePoint site, from "SNL Paper Rubric," *School for New Learning*, DePaul University, 2017, snl.depaul.edu/student-resources/writing/Pages/Paper-Grading-Rubric.aspx

For those serving "nontraditional" student populations, this story of needing to build your

own resources and then losing control of them is surely familiar. Our initial DIY approach

allowed us to create a site that worked for our users, but not as well as it might have with better

design support. That said, the discussions the site generated among faculty and students about

writing did not end when the site was launched. The ongoing addition of resources, sample

papers, and interviews with student and faculty writers was particularly helpful in sustaining the

college's engagement in conversations about what, how, and why we write. As we look to the

future, we are considering moving the site yet again—this time to the University's ePortfolio platform. It offers more flexibility than SharePoint while also providing built-in design tools, and, of course, the opportunity for more conversation about writing.

**Boot camps by Kenya Grooms and Kamilah Cummings**

Online resources like the website are clearly valuable for adult learners, but they are not sufficient. Adults, like all students, need interactive opportunities outside of course time to ask questions, get feedback, and work on their writing with faculty, tutors, and peers. While such opportunities are readily available for those who study, work, and often live on campus, they need to be intentionally designed for those who do not. Carol Kasworm recommends that "key" university staff provide "personal attention" and "support" to adult learners, thus creating an "institutional climate that welcomes adults" and engages them emotionally (29). In addition, research supports the importance of small group work and collaboration in helping adults ease anxieties, navigate their identities as students, and "facilitate learning" (Taylor et al. 68).

Boot camps are one example of how to provide small group, collaborative, and personalized support that links adults with peers, faculty, and staff. Kenya Grooms developed boot camps in June 2011 to support adults who had received incomplete grades. At DePaul, students have two quarters to complete their work in a course for which they have received an incomplete. If they have not done so in this time frame, the grade is automatically converted to an F. Kenya began boot camps because too many students, often still overwhelmed by the life circumstances that led to the Incomplete in the first place, were receiving F grades as the result of unresolved incompletes.

An incomplete grade is issued when a student is unable to complete the work for a course by the end of the term due to "unusual or unforeseeable circumstances" ("Grades"). Adult life is,

of course, full of unforeseen circumstances. In the three quarters between Fall 2015 and Spring 2016 quarters, 313 of SNL's adult students received 439 incomplete grades. We know that "the majority of [adult learners] encounter at least one educational barrier in their lifetimes" (Caruth 29). Health, employment, access to transportation, child care, and housing all can and do change unexpectedly.  Caruth points out "many adult learners are more likely to leave educational institutions without earning a college degree due to these additional barriers" (29). Erisman and Steele report that the top two barriers cited by adult non-completers were family and work responsibilities (14). Thus, Kenya began the boot camps to assist students with completing their coursework, usually final papers, and to minimize their risk of attrition.

We initially offered two four-hour boot camps at our downtown Chicago campus each quarter and have since expanded. To accommodate student work schedules, we offer sessions on Saturday mornings and weekday evenings. Students can RSVP or drop in. They can arrive and leave at any time during the four hours. We structure the boot camps in this way because we know from research and our own experiences that nontraditional learners require flexibility given the many demands on their time. In addition to posting flyers and sending emails to promote the boot camps, we ask faculty and advisors to encourage students who have incomplete grades to attend. Students are instructed to notify the instructor of the course in which they received the incomplete grade that they plan to attend a boot camp, to bring written instructions for the assignments they need to complete, and to bring a flash drive to save their work.

Boot camps are held in computer labs where students can immediately start working on their assignments with the support of the boot camp team. We provide light refreshments, which enhance the welcoming atmosphere and help sustain students through the long work session. At the start of each boot camp, students come together in a small group with the support team to

briefly discuss their work. During these conversations, students learn from their peers and the support team becomes aware of each student's needs. At the inaugural sessions, Library Services, tutors from the University Writing Center, and three to four part-time faculty members who taught core courses were assigned to each boot camp to provide a support team for attendees. Of these, students most appreciated the presence of the college faculty. The Librarians did not return after the initial sessions and Writing Center support has varied depending upon the availability of tutors.

Several students became boot camp repeaters, using the support they received not only to resolve incompletes, but also to receive assistance on their current coursework. Over time, we found that students who did not have incomplete grades were attending boot camps to get writing support and assistance. Students were using their boot camp time to write, plan, meet with a faculty member, just drop in and ask a question, or ask for feedback on a piece of writing (Triller Fry et al.). Boot camps were assisting students at every stage of the writing process from invention to revision to interpreting instructor feedback.  The popularity of the boot camps led to their expansion to our three suburban campuses in 2014. We grew from offering two boot camps per quarter to five.  Given the expanded scope and number of boot camps, the SNL Writing Program assumed responsibility for them and Kamilah Cummings became the coordinator in 2015.

Since adult lives can play havoc with the deadlines inherent in academic terms and incompletes leave learners without the structure and support inherent in courses, boot camps provide structured opportunities for adults to work on their writing with peers, tutors, and faculty. In a recent study, 89 percent of adult learners attending four-year institutions and 88 percent of those at community colleges responded that it was important that they "receive the

help [they] need to stay on track with [their] program of study" (Ruffalo Noel Levitz 5). On post-boot camp surveys, students report "they like the dedicated time to write out (their) essay assignments and ask questions when (they) get stuck" (SNL Writing Program, *2017 Boot Camp Surveys*). They also report that "the one-on-one contact" and small size are the best parts of the boot camps (SNL Writing Program, *2017 Boot Camp Surveys*).

Students report not just that they feel supported, but also that they are making significant progress on their assignments and their development as writers. Data from surveys of students who attended boot camps from December 2016 through the Summer 2017 quarter reveals that all respondents had moved closer to completing their writing projects (see fig. 5). Students were asked to evaluate the completeness of their projects before and after attending a boot camp on a ten-point scale. The aggregate of students reported being at 5.5 before and 8.6 after the boot camps. Additionally, all respondents thought their overall writing had improved as result of their work at the boot camps, with 75% indicating that their writing had improved "quite a bit." Further, when asked to self-assess their writing improvement after attending a boot camp compared to working with tutors at the University writing center, respondents indicated that they saw greater improvements in their writing as a result of their work with faculty at the boot camps (SNL Writing Program, *SNL Writing Assessment Report* 47). This response appears to support



Fig.5. Comparison of assignment completion before and after attending a boot camp from SNL Writing Program. *SNL Writing Assessment Report 2016-2017*. July 2017.

Linda Wyatt's argument that "[i]nstitutions must provide tutoring labs and services identified specifically for students aged 25 and above staffed by tutors aged 25 and above" (18). LaTrice Jones, a 2017 graduate of the SNL program, was interviewed about her experience with the boot camps (interview available at youtu.be/3j13T5yAJFQ). She stated that she attended at least one boot camp every quarter and that she used the boot camps to work on "any assignment" with which she needed help (SNL DePaul).

Like most respondents to the boot camp surveys, LaTrice says that the boot camps helped her improve her academic writing skills. The interview also reveals another benefit of the boot camps, which is that they help address emotional factors that affect nontraditional learners. LaTrice remarks that she "felt good" coming to the boot camps, adding that they were a welcoming environment where everyone shared the same goal of completing their assignments. Research tells us that nontraditional and adult students often experience feelings of isolation, insecurity, and self-doubt about their ability to succeed in the college environment (Kasworm 27-29). A study that compared how traditional and nontraditional students cope with stress found that nontraditional students "reported that interacting with faculty and staff was helpful in reducing stress" (Forbus et al. 122). Therefore, it is not surprising that an aspect of the boot camps that LaTrice says she "loved" was that faculty were there and willing to help with "any" writing projects regardless of size (SNL DePaul). She also notes that working directly with faculty familiar with the SNL program and assignments was beneficial (SNL DePaul). Based on our surveys, her experience is not unique. In response to a question regarding what they liked most about the boot camps, most respondents identified the one-on-one assistance from SNL faculty as a top benefit (SNL Writing Program, *2017 Boot Camp Surveys*).

Feedback from students, faculty, and advisors as well as our own observations indicate that boot camp attendees have benefitted from using this resource to support their growth and development as academic writers and college students. When asked how the boot camps could better serve them, many students responded that they would like us to offer boot camps more frequently. Currently, it appears unlikely that this will happen. Boot camp attendance has continued to grow since we began tracking it in 2014, with 134 attendees in the 2016-2017 academic year almost doubling the 72 attendees in the previous year. Nevertheless, with each boot camp averaging 7.4 students and two faculty members, they are expensive. To reduce cost without losing the value of the small size and personalized attention of the boot camps, we have moved to staffing them with full-time faculty and staff who are not paid stipends for their boot camp work as part-time faculty had been.  We also are concentrating the boot camps during the most high-demand times, which are the final weeks of the term and intersessions. Doing so has allowed us to continue offering this important resource even during a period of budget austerity.

**The SNL Month of Writing by Steffanie Triller Fry**

Michelle Navarre Cleary has written elsewhere about a student who experienced such anxiety at the prospect of writing for college that she developed mouth sores ("Anxiety and the Newly Returned Adult Student" 364). Anxiety can range from detrimental to debilitating for adult student writers. Even though many adults write frequently for personal and professional audiences, when the audience becomes academic, these same students freeze up. In the personal arena, their writing is accepted unequivocally as communication. In the professional world, supervisors may edit, but ultimately accept and share their writings. In the classroom, however, adults are most often not writing for such authentic audiences. As the arbiters of quality, the instructors assign an evaluative mark to the student's work. For many of the students we work

with, there is no grade less than an A. It is not the task of writing then that stymies students; it is the fear that they will not be able to create quality on the page.

At the same time, adult commuter students lack the leisure time to form the communities of practice that would enable them to more easily assimilate to academic language, culture, and writing. Martinez et al. found that leisure writing was associated with higher levels of writing self-efficacy, and also that higher levels of writing anxiety were associated with lower levels of writing self-efficacy:

> Although quantity of writing does not predict quality of writing, students who engage in more free writing or leisure writing are able to express themselves creatively through writing without feeling constrained by the rules of grammar or structure of formal writing assignments. (357)

Well aware of these challenges and the remedies proposed by Martinez et al. and others like Peter Elbow (see *Writing Without Teachers*), the SNL Writing Program imagined a Month of Writing event where SNL students could write without fear of assessment, and perhaps participate in a meaningful (productive, even) act of leisure or free writing that they actually enjoyed. Thus, in 2012, the Month of Writing (MOW) was born.

Given that it has thirty-one days, falls in the middle of the quarter, and already holds the National Day on Writing, October seemed like a natural fit for the MOW. The SNL Writing Program began recruiting students, faculty, alumni and staff through fliers and emails. We set our goal at one million words and an anonymous donor pledged $1,000 in scholarship money for SNL if we met our goal. In the third week it seemed questionable that we would reach one million words, but, by the end of the month, participants had collectively written 1,131,981 million words. Much like National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo), the challenge is

individual, but the institution provides support, encouragement, and events throughout the month.

The premiere event of the MOW is the Craft of Composing Panel. This panel, usually held as the "kickoff event" to the month, is assembled with SNL-affiliated writers who discuss their processes for composing work in fiction, poetry, the blogosphere, academic writing, and nonfiction. Without fail, it results in a rich and colorful discussion about writing gains and losses, and the tricks that published writers use to keep themselves in the chair, so to speak. We record the panel and publish it on the MOW website so that online students and those who cannot attend can still benefit from it.

The home base for the MOW is its website. It provides students with prompts for writing, a registration page, and a running total. Month of Writing followers can check in on the total number of words written by all participants or the number of words written by each challenger. We invite participants to share some of their writing on the website, and we interview some of them about their experiences participating in the Month of Writing. We hope that the website will help participants feel that they are sharing the experience. We ask them to submit a weekly word count every Friday, so that we can share our incremental progress toward the one-million-word goal.

In 2012, SNL earned the $1,000 scholarship and with 50 participants, the SNL Writing Program celebrated a successful event and planned to set the goal at 1.5 million words for the following year. But without a monetary incentive, and with fewer participant writers, we failed to meet our goal in 2013. Since then, our experience with the MOW has been one of tinkering. Each year we have tried to create new incentives, new opportunities for participants to write together, and new materials on our website to prompt writing. Some flopped; others were

effective. A few had unexpected but pleasant outcomes.

In addition, the SNL Writing Program member in charge of the MOW shifted over the years. Each leadership transition infused the event with new energy and expertise. In years one through three, I focused on developing the website, tweaking the rules for the event, making the event university-wide rather than college-specific, and developing a separate course called "SNL Writing Marathon" that runs concurrently with the MOW. In years four and five, the organizers increased the diversity of the Craft of Composing Panel, made connections with the university Writing Center, and negotiated with the Dean to offer a scholarship to the MOW winner. In 2016, the first year of the individual scholarship, participation nearly tripled from the year before.

For the participant writers, the wins realized during this month were myriad: a veteran spent the month just writing and found peace working through a number of issues. A faculty member found her "blogging voice" (Fitzsimons). One student worked on a novel that she would eventually self-publish (Hulstein). Another student worked on multiple projects but found value in the discipline of the month: "Knowing that I had a goal and a time frame to achieve it helped me stay focused on writing at least five days of the week" (anitalewis). She wrote almost 20,000 words. Another student found that the invitation to write for quantity increased the quality of his work, and even encouraged a genre shift: "I began writing and rewriting a poem, that transformed into a brief speech describing the challenges communities I am involved [in] are facing. I am proud of this piece because it truly came from my heart and I plan to continue working on this until it is more than what I expected it to be" (Dre Smith).

But not all of the returns were so rosy. In her SNL Writing News blog post titled "Lessons in Failure," Kamilah echoes the experience of the majority of MOW participants: an

inability to meet the individual 50,000-word count goal (Cummings). In the first few years of the

event, each participant was encouraged to write 50,000 words. This is how NaNoWriMo does it,

and we thought that a lofty goal would encourage better returns. But, out of 50 writers in the first

year, only 8 met the 50,000-word mark. While we had collective success with our million words,

by setting the word count goal so high, we doomed most participants to inevitable failure, and

possibly even discouraged many potential participants from joining the MOW. As a result, we

eventually moved to a self-defined goal in 2014. Each participant sets an individual goal for the

month. The first time we did this, 67% of our participants met their own word count goal.

Together we wrote 424,124 words, much less than one million, but more individual participants

experienced success ("The 2014 Challenge").

DePaul University's University Center for Writing-based Learning (UCWbL) supported

the MOW in many ways. Although plans to partner with them to expand MOW beyond the

college did not work out, they shared MOW fliers at all of their events, provided panelists to our

Craft of Composing Panel and dedicated their October open mike night to the School for New

Learning. I brought a group of adult student writers to this open-mike event. It took place in the

Loop Writing Center office, a narrow room shaped like an L. Many of the adult students hid out

of sight. Others talked about the "real writers" who read first. A few adults got up to read, likely

because I offered extra credit. They were hesitant, apologetic. The other adult writers, observing

their peers, were quiet and awkward, spinning in their office chairs haphazardly placed around

the room. Many had to peek around a corner or around a center pole in the room to see their

classmate read. However, those who did stand up to read felt more a part of the university

community of writers. But they were still, literally and figuratively, on the margins of the open-

mike event, and as writers at the university. We had hoped that the MOW would engender

community amongst our adult commuter students and bring SNL students in closer contact with the traditional students and writing services at the university; instead, they have remained primarily sequestered, participating in the collective challenge but creating their own work.

That said, an unexpected but pleasant outcome seems to be the way that participating in the MOW created common ground amongst SNL's adult faculty and its students. Kamilah and I both reflected in SNL Writing News blog posts about the ways we experienced empathy for our students by participating in the event. Kamilah found that her inability to meet her 50,000-word goal mirrored her overcommitted students' inability to meet assignment deadlines, and, moreover, found that they shared her disappointment (Cummings). I struggled with a craft essay from my graduate program, and after hearing a MOW student's experience, used his advice and the just-write method to bring my own expertise to the draft (Triller Fry, "The 2014 Month of Writing"). A faculty participant, "Don Quixote," reflected after participating in the MOW that he

> felt more connected to a community of writers, and this transformed my writing, typically a solitary experience, into a social act... In the end, the month encouraged me to reflect upon and appreciate writing as an important part of my everyday experience, and this singularly made my participation in the experience very worthwhile. (Quixote, "The 2014 Challenge")

It seems the raw act of writing for quantity rather than quality evened the playing field. Because students and faculty shared the common goal of writing toward a word count, because together we did not fear the assessment of what we wrote, we shared similar struggles and similar frustrations. It can be powerful for instructors to humble themselves every once in awhile. Sometimes, we all need to Just Write.

**Writing Hangouts and Webinars by Nicholas Alexander Hayes**

As part of the School for New Learning's mission to meet our students where they are, the college began a push in 2001 to provide consistent online offerings to students. Importantly, the asynchronous online environment allows adults to accommodate their various academic, professional and personal responsibilities without being fettered to set times and locations (Halpern and Tucker; Lee et al. 330). Over the last 16 years, SNL online course enrollments have outpaced on-ground enrollments. The success of the online program is in keeping with the observation that "programs that have historically catered to the adult or non-traditional learner have a richer infrastructure for supporting distance learning than do programs without a large adult student population" (Halpern and Tucker 113).

The asynchronous environment provides adult students with the flexibility they need, but it lacks the community of on-ground classes (Wang). The autonomy expected of online students can leave them with a sense of being ungrounded in their studies (Bourdeaux and Schoenack). Adult students, especially those who have insufficient support at home and work, may require more attention and encouragement from school if they are going to persist in their studies (Park and Choi 215). The lack of a sense of community contributes to lower levels of satisfaction and necessitates a greater awareness of and attention to these vulnerable students (Ke and Xie 144). Student satisfaction is an important indicator of whether online students will complete a course (Levy 189). Therefore, it is not surprising that students drop online classes with a greater frequency than on-ground ones (Lee et al. 329).

Moreover, when the SNL Writing Program surveyed students in 2016, the online population expressed frustration that they could not use many of the support services offered. Students from Texas, Arizona, and other distant locations were upset that they could not

participate in boot camps and other campus-based support. These students faced academic

challenges similar to their on-ground compatriots but did not have easy access to any of the

physical campus locations. At the university-level, the Writing Center offers some online

services including emailed feedback on papers and video conferencing. However, students have

to arrange these services during the Writing Center's open hours, which are scheduled during

traditional working hours. The frustration with the limited access to services corresponds to the

larger "demand for educational services that is [sic] available anytime and anyplace" (Whiteman

12).

      To address student concerns and supplement the Writing Center's existing services, I

developed two types of online student support: Writing Tune-Up Webinars and Advanced

Project Hangouts. Webinars and Hangouts meet five of the Council for Adult and Experiential

Learning's ten "principles of effectiveness for serving adult learners" (CAEL) by using

technology to provide academic support that augments traditional instruction and supports adult

learning beyond the physical campus. These services try to anticipate student needs while

demonstrating three qualities that adult-focused programs should possess: "flexibility,

adaptability, and creativity" (Compton et al. 79).

      The Writing Tune-Up Webinar series launched in Winter 2017 using GoToWebinar. I

chose the webinar format for both its accessibility and familiarity for adult students who have

attended webinars as part of their personal or professional development. The platform allows

screen sharing as well as a place for students to ask questions and comment through chat.

Students are able to see the presenter's screen and hear the presentation. During these hour-long

webinars, I provide a brief talk on an aspect of writing and opportunities for students to ask

questions and interact with each other. Topics have included perennial student and faculty
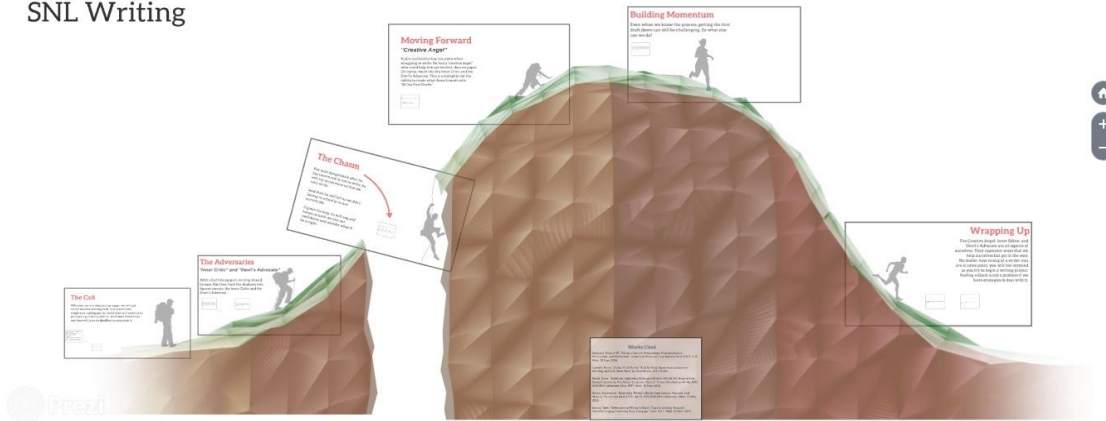
Fig. 7. Confronting Writer's Block by Nicholas Hayes, 2017.

concerns such as confronting writer's block, basic academic skills (like acceptable ways to email instructors), essay structures, and citation basics.

I create the visual elements of the talks in PowerPoint or Prezi. The presentations have an average of 39 slides. Typically, the slides combine short text with visual images to create a narrative or metaphor that helps explain the topic. The Confronting Writer's Block webinar is built around images of a figure climbing and then descending a mount to help capture the effort and relief of finding ways to overcome writer's block (see fig. 7). The presentation on essay structure uses images of dressers to create an extended metaphor about creating structures that can be filled with a variety of content.  Some slides ask a multiple-choice question which students answer using the chat feature. I then respond to their answers. Students are also encouraged to use the chat window to ask questions throughout the presentation. The interaction between presenter and peers and the connection of new and previous knowledge represent two qualities of "high-quality online learning" (Ke and Xie 137). Just as the boot camps do for local

students, the webinars provide distance students with a focused, real-time learning opportunity in which they can engage with a faculty member who is not giving them a grade.

Webinars are typically scheduled during the lunch hour (12pm-1pm) or around the end of the working day (5pm-6pm) to accommodate the schedules of many adult students. All SNL students are informed about webinars and other college and university activities in an emailed newsletter. Additionally, online students are sent targeted emails specifically advertising this service since they may not have access to other services.

In the year since Writing Tune-Up began, I have offered six webinars. On average 13 students have registered for each session and 5.3 students have actually attended, a conversion rate of 41% from registration to attendance. This matches the national average of 40% for continuing education webinars (ON24 10). The most popular webinars have been Confronting Writer's Block and Citation Basics. Both of these have been offered twice. Confronting Writer's Block had an average of 11 registrants and 6.5 attendees per session (59% conversion), and Citation Basics had an average of 19 registrants and 7 attendees per session (37% conversion).

Writing Tune-Up Webinars were designed as a general service for all SNL students to provide a consistent system of support. In contrast, Writing Hangouts were developed with a much narrower audience in mind: students in the online version of our capstone Advanced Project class. When faced with an unfamiliar task (like a large research project) student writing may regress ("Presenting Best Practices"). This has led some frustrated Advanced Project instructors to declare that our students do not know how to write. Hangouts were designed as a way of reminding students of what they know and helping them address any actual deficits.

Writing Hangouts draw inspiration from DePaul's Writing Fellows program. The Writing Fellows Program embeds writing tutors in courses to provide writing-across-the-curriculum

support. Unfortunately, resources for the Fellows Program at DePaul are limited. Instructors must request a tutor early and not all requests can be met. In addition, instructors who are assigned a fellow must agree to make changes to their class including: requiring all students to see the fellows for at least four hours as part of their final grade as well as changing their syllabus and class structure to focus on the drafting process ("The Writing Fellows Program"). Such agreements help make fellows effective by selecting for faculty who are willing to collaborate with their fellow (Hall and Bradley 22). Students and instructors benefit from such arrangements. In their study "What Differences Do Writing Fellows Make?", Regaignon and Bromley found "a statistically significant improvement in [students'] overall writing score" after they worked with a fellow (51). Writing Hangouts were designed as a way of complementing the existing service while ensuring that students in online Advanced Project courses without fellows have additional writing support. Both Writing Fellows and Writing Hangouts offer students writing support while allowing their course instructors to devote less time and energy to writing instruction.

Before the beginning of each quarter, I offer online Advanced Project instructors the opportunity to include Hangouts in their classes. Instructors who want Hangouts grant me Teaching Assistant accesses to their courses. This allows me to use our online course management system, Desire to Learn, to contact registered students. My first message to students is a general explanation of the Writing Hangout and a link to a Doodle poll to determine preferred times for our synchronous online meetings. I talk with instructors throughout the quarter to learn what they would like me to focus on during Hangouts and to provide updates about student concerns that emerge during Hangouts. This fosters open communication and

collaboration and reduces the possibility that students will get mixed messages about their writing.

Google Hangouts is the platform used for Writing Hangouts because it is a free option that allows students to join the conversation by video, audio, or chat on a wide range of devices, including their work computers, their personal laptops, or even their phones. These real-time online chats provide a space for students to troubleshoot and discuss difficulties they are having with their writing and research with an SNL Writing instructor and with peers who are doing the same coursework. One student described Writing Hangouts thus: "The hangout is basically like going to a class where you can formulate your questions about your current writing difficulties with your Advanced Project, or any questions related" (qtd. in Triller Fry "An Opportunity"). The real-time aspect of this service attempts to foster a sense of community for an online population that struggles to find it. I am present to help students access resources and answer questions. But the main goal is to facilitate conversations between students that help create contexts for learning (Handley and Oaks 115; O'Donnell and Tobbell 321). From winter to summer 2017, 14 Writing Hangouts have served 40 students. Not surprisingly, students are more likely to attend if required or even just encouraged to do so by their course instructor.

As these Writing Tune-up Webinars and Hangouts enter their second-year, I am using student feedback to make them more appealing. For example, last year's Student Satisfaction Survey has given me a set of student-generated topics for future webinars. I am also considering offering some webinars and hangouts later in the evening. In addition to providing distance students with opportunities for writing support, the Writing Tune-up Webinars and Hangouts also serve local students. Another advantage of webinars and hangouts is that they are relatively inexpensive. Like many universities, colleges, and programs, DePaul University and the School

for New Learning are facing an economic contraction. These online services are one way to maximize the benefits for students while keeping costs down.

**Conclusion**

As universities tighten budgets and look for new ways to grow enrollments, they cannot lose sight of the reality that adults and other nontraditional learners are the new majority on campus. Research shows that adults place high importance on receiving support from their institutions to help them complete their degrees (Ruffalo Noel Levitz 5). As our experience and research have shown, resources designed for traditional college students are insufficient to serve adult learners. Moreover, in the increasingly competitive landscape of higher education, the adult population has many options. Therefore, universities who seek to serve this growing population can no longer afford to support them using only traditional methods. Kasworm reminds us that in both the classroom and the larger college community adults "experience environmental and relational cues, messages, and supports (or lack thereof)." She argues, "adults identify through these cultural cues which students matter," adding that this in turn informs their beliefs about their identity as students and their ability to succeed academically and beyond (33).  As such, like the writing resources that we have designed, resources intended to support adults require creativity and flexibility. However, more importantly, they require a commitment from the university to not only enroll these students but to create a truly inclusive environment that supports them in acclimating to and ultimately graduating from the university.

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