

Structures and supports necessary for the planning, teaching, and assessing of online writing courses at Kingsborough Community College, CUNY

Produced by the Course Review Committee (CRC) of 2018-19:

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Executive Summary

Kingsborough's commitment to offer a fully online Associate's degree program necessitates the expansion of online sections of English 12 and 24, the CUNY Pathways required core courses in Composition. Over the course of the 2018-19 academic year, the Composition Program's Course Review Committee (CRC) focused on the development of guidelines regarding the teaching and support of online writing courses in the English department. During the Fall 2018 semester, the faculty in the CRC created a list of shared concerns regarding this expansion:

- Quality of instruction and course effectiveness
- Online instructor "presence"
- Instructor isolation
- Workload increase (online teaching often takes more time)
- Tech deficiencies -- for students, faculty, and the college as a whole
- Inadequacy of the Blackboard mobile app
- Equity issues for students and faculty; ensuring that those teaching and learning in online settings are fully supported by the institution
- Possible erosion of academic freedom and control over curriculum
- Student retention; attrition is particularly high in online courses
- Inadequate preparation, of faculty and of students, for the fully online experience
- Possible administrative pressure to teach online
- Loss of literacy learning as a *social* process

Based on our analysis of these central concerns, and based on our review of national scholarship and best practices in online writing instruction, we have concluded that the structures and supports outlined in the pages that follow must be in place in order to ensure the high quality and relevance of online sections of English 12 and 24. Further, the conditions listed below are such

that they must be revisited and supported on an ongoing basis and will require continuous reconsideration by the Composition program, the English Department, the Kingsborough Center for e-Learning, the Center for Academic Writing Success, the Office of Academic Affairs, and the Instructional Committee of the College Council.

Several themes run through the various recommendations we make on the following pages, the most important of which are the following:

- Work closely with and recognize the faculty's right to determine the digital platforms, environments, and tools that best support the online teaching of composition;**
- Cap online English 12 and 24 sections at 20 students;**
- Provide faculty and students adequate preparation, technology, and ongoing support to do this work both on and off campus.**
- Base expansion of new sections of online Eng 12 & 24 on overall enrollment, student preparation, and teacher preparation.**

The conditions we require are organized into three sections below—access, preparation & ongoing support; pedagogy, learning, & assessment; and workload, rights, & labor. Further, each of these three sections is subdivided into subsections focused on the needs and roles of students, faculty, the Composition program & English department, and the college as a whole.

1 | Access, Preparation, & Ongoing Support

Students should have:

1. Adequate Technology

A functioning computer and/or tablet with up-to-date software.

A reliable internet connection, preferably in their homes or wherever they plan to do the bulk of their online coursework.

A functioning smartphone and sufficiently large data plan, if they plan to use their phones for some of the coursework.

A completely functional Blackboard app. Barring this, students should be prepared to do their online coursework on a device other than a smartphone.

2. Adequate Readiness for Online Learning.

An appropriate screening process, prior to registration, that would enable students to self-select for online or face-to-face composition courses, on the premise that such courses are not going to work for everyone.

Access to orientation by the institution that brings them up to speed on everything they'll need to know to do well in the class, including study habits and skills appropriate to online classes.

A work-life schedule that allows them to consistently spend approximately 6 - 8 hours per week on their online composition course. This means that this time must be set aside for the online composition course every week throughout the semester.

3. Adequate Ongoing Tech Support.

Easy and direct access to online tutoring in reading and writing via the Center for Academic Writing Success (CAWS), including work with a tutor or writing fellow.

Easy and direct access via the LMS to the Kibbee library and a librarian for research and building background knowledge.

Dedicated tech support for online composition students to quickly answer questions, teach students how to use any unfamiliar technology, and problem solve tech issues as they may arise, such as: issues with the LMS interface, issues with the LMS app functionality, etc.

4. Adequate Access to Instructional Resources.

Access to learning communities, civic engagement credits, and honors enrichment components.

The opportunity to give feedback at midterm or other times during the semester via surveys online and/or paper on technical and pedagogical aspects specifically relevant to the online composition course modalities.

Faculty should have:

1. Adequate Technology

A mobile computer with up-to-date software and hardware (including built-in cameras and microphones) as well as online access for off-campus work.

A completely functional Blackboard app. LMS platforms other than Blackboard if the faculty determine that they are better suited to online composition courses.

Ability to select technology platforms and media for the course strategically, on basis of learning goals and student access / student strengths.

2. Adequate Training and Ongoing Support.

Professional development on best practices in online composition pedagogy.

Faculty mentoring prior to, and during semester, for faculty new to teaching online composition courses.

Professional development on using the various technologies associated with/essential to the success of online composition courses (such as using Yuja or Camtasia for screen capture video feedback, how to create interactive student groups, etc.).

Training in how to create back-up plans in case of technology glitches or failures.

Dedicated tech support for online composition course faculty to quickly answer questions and problem solve tech issues as they may arise.

Composition Program/English Department should:

1. Provide faculty with adequate professional development.

Provide relevant professional development to online writing instructors (this should also come from the institution) - see [Effective Practice 7.6](#) in the CCCC OWI doc.

Access to appropriate resources to support the professional development of faculty teaching online composition courses. Such resources include, for example, NTA funding, reassigned time, reimbursement for travel to national conferences, a dedicated contact in the IT department with whom we can work, dedicated professional development sessions run by KCeL on an ongoing basis, etc.

Participate in the development of any online student screening tool to assess student readiness for online courses.

Support faculty in preparation of multi-modal material for students with learning disabilities.

Maintain and distribute a list each semester of who is teaching OWI.

Develop and maintain a dynamic online bank wherein online-writing instructors submit curricula (informal and formal writing assignments, discussion and feedback ideas, etc.) on an ongoing basis. Store this bank on our Commons site and make this portion of it only accessible via CUNY credentials (therefore not public).

2. Mediate between individual instructor and the college/university.

Protect academic freedom of faculty members in matters of curriculum and online course design.

Maintain quality control over instruction in online classes and make appropriate interventions as necessary.

3. Establish policy for online composition courses.

Decision-making over the number of online composition courses offered each semester.

Create curricular suggestions and parameters

Maintain a forum for collective discussion for troubleshooting and problem-solving collaboration for OW instructors.

4. Gather appropriate data.

Determine what metrics and analytics should be collected by the college in order to assess online composition courses

Play a role in collecting and reviewing such data, and based on these analyses make policy recommendations regarding online composition courses and future course design.

Institution should develop and/or offer:

1. Before the class starts.

A registration block that does not allow students to register for online composition courses until they have gone through screening/selection process and demonstrated that they meet the minimum requirements (see first four points in student section, above).

Well-designed, proactive advisement that determines which students are appropriate for online composition classes (i.e. have access to the above) and which are not. Create a specific "Online Advisement" service, which would include advisers who solely advise online students and who deal with readiness assessment, recruitment, retention, progress, and completion.

Confirm that students have access to required technologies and as necessary advise students on institutional resources for such technologies.

Cap class enrollment at 20 students.

Reach out proactively to registered students regarding any accessibility needs/issues they may have, so faculty will be able to create and prepare materials adequately.

Require students to meet or correspond with an advisor regarding general course setup, participation requirements, expectations, etc. before registering for OWI.

Provide additional compensation for first-time online writing instructors (since the first time will be especially time-consuming).

2. While the class is running.

Offer both an offline and online preparation meeting at the end of each term for students considering OWI or planning to take OWI--goal is to make potential OWI students aware of course expectations and modalities and how they differ from face-to-face experiences (f2f).

Make technical assistance available to online faculty members during instructional hours.

3. After the class ends.

A well designed, data collection and analysis process that allows the college, and the English department, to assess student success in online writing courses.

Provide adequate resources for professional development opportunities and mentoring to writing program administrators and faculty.

Provide professional development, in conjunction with the composition program, in online teaching and appropriate technologies to online writing instructors.

Provide data to the department and faculty about online ENG 12 and 24 course retention, with particular attention to when during the term the most online students disappear and/or drop the course.

Provide funding for suggestions above so that the Department can support current faculty and encourage new faculty to venture into online instruction.

2 | Pedagogy, Learning, & Assessment

Students should

Experience a dynamic, interactive, engaging educational environment.

Write, read, and interact, with each other and with their instructor, as much as students in onsite composition courses.

Be prepared for the types of work the online composition courses will require, such as: frequent online digital written interaction with instructor and peers, lengthy online reading and annotation, etc.

Have easy and direct access via the LMS to the Kibbee library and a librarian for research and building background knowledge.

Have easy and direct access via the LMS to CAWS online tutoring in reading and writing.

Be evaluated by the same criteria and student outcomes that are listed in the common Eng 12 and 24 curricula.

Have their attendance and participation assessed via substantial academic engagement in online LMS assignments during the first weeks of the course.

Faculty should

Have their online teaching effectiveness evaluated by criteria established by the English department for teaching writing in online setting.

Design their courses using the most current versions of the Eng 12 and 24 curricula, including student learning outcomes, which are routinely updated by the Composition Program's Course Review Committee (CRC) and are available on the KCC Composition website.

Be free to take advantage of all curricular enhancements available to face-to-face classes, such as: Civic Engagement, Learning Communities, Honors/HEC, etc.

Create learning environments that mirror the de-centered classroom typical of face-to-face composition courses. This might include key strategies such as: peer review, small group interactions, student-centered lessons, collaborative annotation of texts, collaborative writing, and collaborative assessment.

Take advantage of new modalities of teaching and learning afforded by online environments. For example, the teacher should: build redundancies into their communication with students, take advantage of the archival nature of online composition courses, and experiment with the flexibility and options of synchronous and asynchronous interactions with students.

Not have to spend time teaching students how to use the software and platforms that are used in the course. Faculty should be able to focus their time and energy on creating and teaching their courses.

English Department/Composition Program should

Provide structured, regular opportunities for faculty teaching online to share their experiences and successful strategies adapting onsite teaching techniques and experimenting with new techniques made possible by the online environment.

Cap online Eng 12 and 24 courses firmly and non-negotiably at 20 students to reflect the time-intensive nature of high-quality online writing instruction.

Be fully involved in the selection of LMS options, and changes in those options, for online composition courses on an ongoing basis to ensure that Kingsborough provides high quality online writing instruction that meets Pathways student learning outcomes and is responsive to current digital writing practice.

Collaborate with KCeL in designing an ongoing series of workshops on various ways to teach writing online.

Engage in annual program assessment practices that monitor retention, pass rates, and other markers of student success and progress in online composition courses. These practices should be sure to involve differential outcomes analyses for various student demographic categories.

Kingsborough should

Make available to faculty the software and online platforms necessary to create dynamic online learning environments appropriate for composition courses.

Support and respect the course cap of 20 for all online composition courses.

Provide LMS options for the teaching of composition courses that provide access to vital functions for the teaching of digital literacy skills, such as:

- Peer review of student writing, synchronous and asynchronous. Live, collaborative commenting on student writing.
- Features that allow for font type and color variation.
- Recording audio feedback and screen capture videos simultaneously.
- Live, collaborative annotation of text.
- Video calling and recording functions.
- Supports various file types to allow multimodal composition, such as: videos, images, hypertext, etc.
- Functions that support a variety of scaffolding methods, activities, and processes to support and encourage student engagement through active participatory learning.

Provide support for faculty to ensure that their online learning environments are fully ADA compliant.

3 | Workload, Rights, & Labor Issues

Students

Although labor and workload rights do not directly apply to students, faculty working conditions *are* students' learning conditions. PSC-CUNY negotiated contractual protections directly benefit students.

Faculty

Composition classes by definition take more time than less highly interactive pedagogical models. Teaching a genuinely interactive course online, engaging students in active discussions, is even more labor-intensive and, particularly in asynchronous classes, supervising and evaluating online discussion, sharing of student work, and peer editing can take much more than the standard "contact hours" for a face-to-face course. Teaching online should not require violations of contractually negotiated workloads. Given this, KCC must **cap online English 12 and 24 courses firmly and non-negotiably at 20 students** to reflect the time-intensive nature of high-quality online writing instruction.

All content of online writing courses remain the intellectual property of the professor who created them. This includes: syllabi, course materials, instructional texts/videos, responses to student writing, responses to other types of student work, etc.

To teach online effectively, faculty need functional mobile equipment, software, and online and phone tech support.

Faculty should not be forced to teach online courses; online teaching should be voluntary.

Composition Program/English Department

Should request and support firm class caps of 20 students per section in online Eng 12 and 24 courses in order to comply with contractual workload standards. This cap should be worked on in consultation with the Writing Discipline Council and brought to the attention of the PSC-CUNY Executive Council, and the contract negotiating team.

Kingsborough

The institution should provide functional mobile equipment, software, and tech support that enable the faculty member to access student work in various locations easefully and functionally.

The CUNY faculty contract needs to stipulate that our individual curricula, lessons, modules, materials, etc. remain the property of faculty in the case of a strike or any other situation in which our content could be potentially used without our permission. KCC could do something genuinely innovative by supporting these contractual provisions.

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