TYCA Working Paper #2
Two-Year College English Faculty Teaching Adjustments Related to Workload
Two-Year College English Association
Workload Task Force
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Abstract

In Fall of 2019, the Two-Year College English Association distributed a 39-question survey to two-year college English faculty through professional listservs, regional distribution lists, and social media platforms. We received 1,062 responses to questions about workload in the areas of teaching, service, and professional development. This working paper draws from a Two-Year College English Association national survey and reports on findings about adjustments to teaching that two-year college English instructors use to manage their workloads. Survey respondents reported making adjustments to teaching in three different categories: assessment, compromises from ideal or preferred approaches to teaching, and online or hybrid teaching. An analysis of survey respondents' comments suggests that two-year college faculty (especially those who teach writing courses) adapt the ways that they implement disciplinary standards for teaching and assessing writing through strategic choices and compromises.

NOTE: This working paper describes compromises made by and consequences for instructors as a result of their workload. Working Paper #3, "Workload Management Strategies for Teaching English at the Two-Year College" reports on general themes and patterns that emerged from an analysis of survey respondents' comments that identify specific strategies that instructors use to manage a teaching-intensive workload.

Overview

Teaching English at two-year colleges is time consuming, labor intensive work. Most instructors have a teaching load of 5/5 or higher each semester (Suh, et al.). Workload for two-year college English instructors is often significantly different from the workload of their disciplinary peers at four-year institutions because faculty contracts focus primarily on teaching, but most instructors still have additional contractual obligations or institutional expectations for service and professional development that supports teaching (Giordano, et al). The labor conditions at two-year colleges require instructors to make adjustments to teaching to manage their workloads, including adapting disciplinary standards for pedagogy and assessment, making compromises to teaching and their professional lives, and using strategies for grading and feedback that reflect high numbers of students and courses.

This working paper reports on findings from a 2019 national faculty workload survey of English instructors who teach at two-year colleges. It provides an overview of responses to an open-ended survey question about adjustments to teaching that instructors make because of their workloads. Instructors identified adjustments they make in order to reduce or manage workload while continuing to maintain the level of quality of their courses. Teaching adjustments are defined as necessary changes made as a result of heavy workload. Adjustments to feedback

and assessment, compromises, and changes in teaching format were frequently described by participants.

Although the survey focused on all types of English teaching at two-year college, comments from participants suggest that most adjustments to teaching focus on writing courses. Most two-year college teachers teach writing, and some teach only writing. Further, respondents' comments on the survey indicate that they view teaching writing courses (especially first-year writing) as perhaps the most labor-intensive and time-intensive part of their jobs, especially in contrast to teaching literature or other specialty courses.

Disciplinary Statements and Teaching Workload

The Conference on College Composition and Communication, the National Council of Teachers of English, and other national organizations that lead postsecondary teaching in English offer many best practices and research-based recommendations for the teaching of writing (and college English more broadly). However, most disciplinary standards for pedagogy and assessment described in professional statements require time and labor to implement. Examples of representative statements include *Writing Assessment: A Position Statement*, *Literacy Assessment: Definitions, Principles, and Practices*, *CCCC Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing*, *CCCC Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing* and, more recently, *CCCC and CWPA Joint Statement in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Taken together, these statements call for writing classrooms and literacy instruction that support NCTE's "Definition of Literacy in a Digital Age," which states that "Literacy has always been a collection of communicative and sociocultural practices shared among communities. As society and technology change, so does literacy. The world demands that a literate person possess and intentionally apply a wide range of skills, competencies, and dispositions. These literacies are interconnected, dynamic, and malleable" (NCTE). The CCCC Statement "Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing" observes that sound writing instruction "emphasizes the rhetorical nature of writing," "considers the needs of real audiences," "recognizes writing as a social act," "enables students to analyze and practice with a variety of genres" and "recognizes writing processes as iterative and complex." The standards for literacy and teaching outlined in these disciplinary statements establish both explicit and implicit guidelines for what instructors should know and do. They describe practices that require time and labor to implement while also assuming that instructors will have the resources and time required for ongoing professional development to keep up with changing literacies and approaches to teaching.

Some disciplinary statements argue for specific practices that directly affect teaching workload. For example, important to the results of this TYCA Working Paper is the recognized professional standard that "Sound writing instruction depends upon frequent, timely, and context-specific feedback to students from an experienced postsecondary instructor" (CCCC, "Principles"). This recognized disciplinary practice requires sufficient time and increases an instructor's workload. The time commitment for adhering to this recommendation increases exponentially for instructors who teach multiple sections of composition or writing-intensive English courses. Recommendations for working conditions in the CCCC "Statement on Working Conditions for Non-Tenure Track Writing Faculty" provide guidance in limiting the labor of teaching writing through low class sizes and fewer course sections. The statement recommends that "NTT faculty workloads should be limited to a maximum twenty students per section of first-year and/or advanced composition courses and a maximum fifteen students per section of basic (or "remedial") writing courses. Generally, NTT faculty should not teach more than three sections of such courses per term," with similar workload guidelines established for tenure-line faculty. These recommendations for class size and a limited number of writing sections are inextricably linked to the time and labor required for following established disciplinary practices for frequent and timely feedback.

However, these disciplinary statements describe working conditions within writing studies as a field but don't specifically address labor conditions and workload at two-year colleges and other teaching-intensive, open-access institutions where a typical semester course load is more than five sections, most available courses are first-year writing, and most responsibilities in a faculty contract focus on teaching while simultaneously requiring more diverse types of service. Nor do they adequately address how non-tenure-line faculty who teach primarily first-year writing at any type of institution are required to teach multiple writing courses to earn a living, especially if they work off the tenure track.

Survey Methods

This working paper presents responses to a question about teaching from a national survey from the Two-Year College English Association, which investigated workload of two-year college faculty and the effects of workload on educator effectiveness. The survey included six demographic questions, 28 closed-ended items that asked respondents to select from a list of possible responses, and five open-ended items. The survey was distributed to TYCA members and other two-year college instructors during Fall 2019; 1,062 participants completed the survey. The TYCA Workload Task Force conducted a mixed-methods analysis of responses to the survey using descriptive statistics to analyze closed-ended responses. We also applied iterative thematic analyses of open-ended responses to survey questions using Dedoose (a web-based platform for analyzing qualitative and mixed methods research) to code each response.

Respondents were asked to respond to the open-ended question "What types of adjustments to your teaching (for example, pedagogical approaches, course design, or assessment practices) have you made in order to accommodate your workload?" This question generated 552 open-ended written responses that were coded iteratively by multiple coders; 54 total codes were applied to responses with 1,627 code applications. The most frequently appearing codes were grouped into categories, which were subsequently developed into themes. The most common code applications related to assessment, which we break into three categories. Other codes with a significant presence included those that the analysis team identified as "compromises," where respondents indicated that they made an adjustment that—if conditions were ideal—that would prefer not to make but do so to manage their workload. Likewise, in the coding and analysis process, we identified online and hybrid teaching as appearing frequently as an adjustment that respondents made.

Adjustments to Teaching to Manage Workload

The responses to question 32 clustered around a few recurring themes. The majority of responses addressed **assessment** (grading, providing feedback to students, and designing writing assignments). The next most frequent category of responses focused on **compromises associated with workload adjustments** identified by survey respondents. A third important set of recurring responses focused on how respondents incorporated **online or hybrid** tools into their teaching, as well as choices they made regarding face-to-face, hybrid, or online-only instruction.

Assessment
Assessment had the highest number of codes for survey responses. Respondents make adjustments to how, where, how frequently, and when they assess writing assignments and other student work. It seems that respondents are taking two very different tacks in their approach. A segment of the respondents are *reducing* feedback on the process work; instead, they only provide feedback via grades. Other respondents take a very different approach,

shifting their feedback to the process components of student work (conferencing, rough drafts, etc.). We discuss this more in the "Conclusions and Implications" section below. For additional analysis and examples of how instructors manage workload through adjusting assessment strategies, see the TYCA working paper, "Workload Management Strategies for Teaching English at Two-Year Colleges."

Assessment adjustments fell into three categories: feedback practices, strategies for efficient assessment, and type and timing of feedback.

Adjustments to Feedback Practices
Responses about adjustments to teaching practices vary depending on what seem to be divergent pedagogical philosophies—the writing *coach* versus the writing *evaluator*. These divergent philosophies then manifest *in where and how instructors make pedagogical and assessment changes.* Representative comments include:
- "No commenting on rough drafts—just final drafts (with an optional revision after that policy)."
- "I make fewer comments on each paper because there are too many students now."
- "I have proved fewer comments on major assignments."
- "I have had to cut down on the amount of writing assignments that get substantial written feedback."
- "I have reduced the amount of written feedback I give my students."
- "Less comments on student papers. I just don't have the time to make as many comments as I would like."
- "I am not able to respond to the amount of writing in the depth I would like for the amount of students in my classes. In some ways, that limited me in the level of detail in personal feedback."

Responses in this common category explained that instructors make workload adjustments by reducing the amount of feedback they provide in several ways: writing fewer comments on a draft, responding to fewer drafts, eliminating narrative feedback on drafts, or providing detailed feedback on fewer writing assignments.

Strategies for Efficient Assessment
A somewhat overlapping group of the 215 responses coded for assessment focus on adopting new or different assessment practices that were sometimes identified as being as effective or more effective. Many of these intersect with best practices in writing studies. Therefore, we did not code them as "compromises," in part because of their alignment with disciplinary approaches to teaching and because the respondents themselves did not describe them as being less desirable or having a negative effect. Examples included:
- "Adopting a contract-grading system."
- "I give audio comments on rough drafts instead of written comments. It's faster. I grade all student work digitally because it's faster than grading on paper."
- "Have started to embed a lot more voice comments."
- "For some assignments, I'll hold individual conferences in place of formal grading because the discussions require fewer written comments."

Many respondents identified "use of rubrics" as a strategy for efficient assessment. Others make strategic choices about feedback. For example, one respondent wrote: "some assignments are assessed for effort only and others get lots of feedback." Using multiple modes of providing feedback and conferencing with students are both reflected in professional position statements, while scholarly attention to contract grading suggests they can be employed for equitable assessment processes.

Changes to Type of Feedback and Timing
A third adjustment to teaching identified that fell in the category of assessment focused on making changes to the type of feedback and the timing of feedback specifically for the purposes of making the assessment process more manageable. There is some overlap in this category with the previous category of strategic assessment (and some were simultaneously coded). Responses in this category specifically addressed when feedback is provided to students within the process for completing a writing project. These approaches to assessment have pedagogical implications. Representative comments about adjustments to the timing and type of feedback include:

- "Built in more drafts or opportunities for revision so students have more opportunity to succeed on particular assignments."
- "I look at drafts in class, require students to go to the Learning Center, and have one conference."
- "As much as I try, the depth of formative feedback I feel benefits students has not let me reduce the amount of time I spend on formative feedback in any class. The only place it seems feasible to reduce feedback is in the summative realm, and I am working on that by using more rubrics for "big" assignments. But in a sense, for many teachers, that just shifts the time spent grading to an intervention draft."
- "Still working on that, post-AB705 (CA). Right now, scaffolding and minimal grading (with increased emphasis on process and feedback)."
- "I stopped assigning homework in my English classes aside from paper writing."
- "I've dropped a few informal writing assignments that were used to encourage reading and connection to the textbook."
- "Working towards more formative vs. summative grading practices."
- "Cutting down the number of low-stakes, skill-building assignments assessed for participation and practice in the writing classroom."
- "At my previous institutions, when I taught LIT classes, I dramatically reduced the number of short writing assignments from 2-3 assignments per week to one per week, but if I were to add a LIT section into my current load, which is all composition, I would definitely feel completely overwhelmed if I had students turn in short writing once a week."

Timing of feedback appeared repeatedly in terms of when instructors responded to or intervened in students' writing processes: a) formative feedback through low-stakes and process work, or b) summative feedback at the point of a final, evaluated submission that students used for an often optional rewrite, focused toward earning a higher grade. What stood out in these responses was what seemed to be two, almost diametrically opposed approaches:

1. Instructors provide *more* feedback at the point of process, and additional opportunities for low-stakes and scaffolded work that students complete toward the final formal assignment.
2. Instructors eliminate either small stakes assignments *or* feedback on small scale assignments and then provide greater levels of substantive feedback on the high-stakes or formal product.

Both of these approaches to assessing student learning and providing feedback illustrate the complexities of implementing national standards for frequent and timely feedback at a teaching-intensive two-year college.

Compromises
We saw codes co-occurring for survey responses in the category of compromises across several significant areas, including feedback practices, writing assignments, and personal time and activities.

Feedback Practices

Though not all respondents framed their adjustments in terms of compromises, some did, usually indicated through language like "I have had to" or "I cannot." For example, one respondent wrote: "I have had to reduce the number of drafts I read or reassign the source of the feedback (more peer review) to keep the workload manageable. Even then, it really isn't." Another participant expressed a compromise as "I have had to cut down on the amount of writing assignments that get substantial written feedback." Still another stated: "I cannot read drafts of all of the papers, comment on them, and then return them for the students to revise, and then grade them again." Others suggested compromises through contrastive language like noting that they cannot have students "engage in process oriented writing *as much as I would like* [emphasis added]," "Sometimes I can't meet with my students, nor engage in process oriented writing as much as *I would like* [emphasis added]," and "Less feedback on essay *than I'd like* [emphasis added]." In this way, respondents revealed a sense of resignation to a lower quality of engagement with and responsiveness to their students' work—or their students—than they would prefer in order to teach well.

Creativity in Pedagogy and Course Design

Another teaching compromise for respondents is creativity as it applies to pedagogy and course design. For example, issues like learning activities, readings, or assignments were framed as recycled, despite a desire for the ability to update materials or approaches. Examples of language indicating compromises to creativity in teaching include "Innovation often takes a backseat—I tend to do the same things (that I know work) to save me prep time" and "limits innovation and trying new things." Most comments about compromises to creativity focused on saving course preparation time. Reusing materials or curricular approaches also appeared in the coding of responses:

- "All my courses sometimes have to use the same main text when I'm given a class or classes just before the semester starts."
- "Sometimes reusing curriculum, textbooks, or assignments i'd rather revise and change but just don't have the time to do so."
- "I also try to repeat courses from semester to semester. I only change one assignment and reading per semester."
- "I use the same material year-to-year for longer than I would like to save prep time."
- "I have copied my email announcements from semester to semester and course to course, so I don't have to retype them. I only edit them in minor ways before sending them out."

Though it is not clear whether this recycling of materials has a negative impact on classrooms or students, it does speak to what can become a compromised learning environment for instructors or students whose intense workload makes it challenging to be responsive to new students or to integrate professional learning.

Personal Time and Activities

Last, respondents identified many strategies for managing their workload related to teaching in terms of their personal time and activities with comments like: "I work whenever I can. For example, I can grade two essays during a pitching change when I am at my son's baseball game"; and " I did most of the prep over vacation, allowing me to keep up with the grading better during the term than I otherwise could." Distressingly, multiple respondents noted that they just sleep less: "I do not sleep more than 3 - 4 hours a night"; "So I don't make changes to my teaching to adjust for workload. I make changes to the amount of sleep I get"; and "cutting back on how much reading I do, losing sleep."

Likewise, respondents sometimes asserted that they made no compromises, and instead compensated for an unmanageable workload by working more and harder. Representative comments include: "None. I made a deal with myself that I would not accept any assignment

that would diminish my students' experience. I just work harder and longer"; and "I work WAAYYY too much. I averaged 70 hours a week all spring term 2019." These responses suggest that adjustments to the labor-intensive work of teaching English at a two-year college can result in work-life balance issues for some instructors. Time spent on teaching activities can come from personal time and reduce instructors' hourly compensation if they work extra hours without additional pay.

Online and Hybrid Teaching
Like feedback and assessment practices, respondents identified several different strategies in relation to online teaching. Responses indicated conflicting views towards online learning. Some felt it online or hybrid teaching was a great method that lessened the workload or helped create a more flexible schedule. Others stated they did not like online teaching but chose it because it has other benefits. Some respondents described the switch to online learning was a compromise.

Compromises Based on Teaching Preferences
In responses some instructors stated they chose online or hybrid sections regardless of their feelings towards them. Representative comments from instructors who choose to teach online even when it is not their preference include:
- "I teach online even though I don't really like it."
- "I have also (even though it's not my favorite mode) taught at least one course per quarter online."

These responses illustrate that teaching online can be an adjustment to workload that instructors select to manage their time or have more flexibility in how they schedule their time. See the TYCA Working Paper 3: "Workload Management Strategies for Teaching English at Two-Year Colleges" (Giordano and Wegner) for a more detailed discussion of online teaching as a workload management strategy.

Benefits of Using Online Teaching Strategies
Even though online classes might not be preferable to some instructors, many felt entirely online or elements of online education created some benefits for both instructors and students. Examples of comments from instructors who draw from online teaching strategies to benefit students and make adjustments to their workloads include:
- "I have shifted more assignments online, even for face-to-face classes, to provide me with more teaching time and less time monitoring work in the classroom."
- "I embrace a hybrid model to make all students feel included. Submissions are digital, and a dialectical conversation between the student, the assignment, and the instructor helps me to make this happen. (This is not a reduction to my workload; it's probably an increase, but it allows me to maintain personal interaction in a busy classroom setting.)"

A few respondents said they felt hybrid components increased their workload; however, they still choose the format because it creates more time for personal interaction and discussion in the classroom.

Flexible Schedules
The shift to online or hybrid courses can also create benefits for instructors. Often respondents stated that online elements do not reduce workload, but rather help create a more flexible schedule:
- "I've shifted to teaching more online to free up my on-campus commitments in order to be available for committees and other non-teaching work."
- "Teach more hybrid courses…allows me one workday a week without class sessions, which is an important catch up time.)"

- "I started teaching writing as a hybrid course for flexibility in my schedule."

These comments illustrate that online teaching is a workload adjustment that some instructors use to control how they use their time and when they do teach even though it might not necessarily reduce teaching workload.

Assessment and Feedback
Responses indicated that some instructors have chosen to incorporate elements of online assessment in order to manage their workload. Digital submission, grading, and assessment of work were the most frequently mentioned:
- "I've had students complete more work online so it's easier and faster for me to grade (blackboard & googledocs)."
- "I use Turnitin's Feedback Studio to mark all writing assignments electronically."
- "I do more activities online for ease-of-grading purposes."

Instructors made these changes for various reasons. Some felt using online assessment and feedback was faster and easier. Others said that online assessment required just as much or more effort than traditional grading. These examples illustrate that adjustments to assessment that use technology, or an online learning management system can be varied and individual to an instructor.

Conclusions and Implications

The primary focus of teaching English at two-year colleges is writing courses, which require labor-intensive, time consuming assessment, and feedback practices to support students' postsecondary literacy development. The workload attached to monitoring and assessing student learning is a significant part of teaching at a two-year college both because of the numbers of sections each instructor teaches (Suh et al.) and because some instructors teach only writing or developmental English courses. Responses to a separate question on making workload visible show that the high needs of diverse learners in an open-access teaching context further complicate and intensify instructors' workloads for assessing student writing. In managing teaching workload, instructors used two competing strategies. Some place greater emphasis on the formal writing assignments for the course and dropped informal/process work or did not assess it. Other respondents have done the opposite by focusing on formative feedback for process work.

Respondents' descriptions of their adjustments to teaching suggest that instructors have to adapt the ways that they implement disciplinary standards for teaching and assessing writing. Instructors with the typical community college teaching load of 5/5 or higher (not including overloads) may not have time to provide the "frequent, timely, and context-specific feedback to students" (CCCC, "Principles"), which is at the center of a disciplinary assessment practices and approaches to teaching writing courses. Survey respondents also make compromises to their preferred modes of teaching and their strategies for achieving work-life balance.

Responses to the survey suggest that there is a gap between how English studies in general and writing studies more specifically addresses issues of workload. Additional scholarship that focuses on teaching, learning, and assessment at two-year colleges and other teaching-intensive, open-access institutions might expand disciplinary perspectives on teaching college English, assessing student learning, and managing teaching workload to account for instructors and students at community colleges. In particular, disciplinary organizations must more fully take into account the needs of two-year college writing instructors in drafting position statements, providing resources for teaching postsecondary writing, and seek out voices of instructors who teach in open-access environments in committees that work on disciplinary

standards. Statements from professional organizations are an essential part of maintaining the integrity of the profession and arguing for effective teaching. However, professional organizations also need to account for the complex challenges of teaching English at two-year colleges and work toward providing resources that help instructors and programs maintain disciplinary standards while also creating sustainable labor conditions for instructors.

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For More Information
For more information about the TYCA workload project and additional reports, see https://ncte.org/groups/tyca/tyca-position-statements/.