Faculty Writing Groups: Sustaining and Thriving in a Virtual World

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Faculty Responsibilities

- Annual evaluations
 - Teaching
 - Service
 - Scholarship
 - Collegiality

• Tenure and promotion policies often focus primarily on research productivity (Penney et al., 2015)



Barriers to Scholarly Productivity

- Education faculty often have less scholarship experience in the form of conducting research, publishing articles, and writing grants (Badenhorst et al., 2013)
- Lack of confidence in one's skills, faculty role complexity, and mental energy (Houfek et al., 2010)
- COVID-19 pandemic
 - Women (especially with children) are disproportionately affected by the pandemic (Bell & Fong, 2021; Deryugina et al., 2021; Krukowski et al., 2021)



Strategies to Improve Scholarly Productivity

• Utilizing a "to-do" list, saying "no," overlapping research with other responsibilities, and limiting multi-tasking (Schrager & Sadowski, 2016)

- Faculty writing groups
 - Goal of "assist[ing] members to move efficiently through the various stages of the writing process" (Houfek et al., 2010, p. 42)
 - Provision of support is essential for sustainability, individual member success, and development of group cohesion (Houfek at al., 2010)
 - Challenge the perception that writing should occur in isolation or within one discipline or group (Castle & Keene, 2016)



Faculty Writing Groups

- Common characteristics (Badenhorst et al., 2013)
 - Commitment to group and regular attendance
 - Firm, flexible structure
 - Online vs. In-person
 - Common goal vs. Independent work
 - Dedicated meeting time
 - Consistent, not necessarily often
 - Small group size



Benefits

- Increased scholarly productivity
 - Number of manuscripts submitted, articles published, other publications (e.g., books), and conference presentations (Garner et al., 2020)
 - Grant productivity submissions and awards (Wiebe & Maticka-Tyndale, 2017)
 - Continuous contact with literature
- Increased collegiality
 - Opportunities to meet other people and work collaboratively led to "the academic writing process [becoming] humanized" (Kensington-Miller & Carter, 2019, p. 8)
 - Mentorship and coaching (identifying barriers; Castle & Keene, 2016)



Potential Concerns

• Time to develop and difficulty for new members to join (Thomson & Kamler, 2013)

• Members' anxiety with sharing ideas, missed deadlines, and inequitable contributions resulting in authorship (Thomson & Kamler, 2013)



Breakout Rooms

- Take the next few minutes to share your experience(s): Here are a few guiding questions:
- Discuss your scholarly productivity during the pandemic.
- Did you participate in a faculty writing group during the pandemic?
- If yes, what benefits did it have? If no, in what ways do you think you could have benefited?
- If you were part of a writing group, what motivated you to join?
- Are faculty writing groups something you are or have ever been interested?
- Other thoughts?



Purpose of Study

• The purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative analysis of faculty members' participation and perceptions of faculty writing groups, as well as assess the potential impact of working in a almost-exclusively virtual world on the utility of writing groups.



Research Questions

- What were the motivations of faculty to join a faculty writing group in the spring of 2020?
- What were the benefits and drawbacks of participating in a remote faculty writing group during the social distancing recommendations due to the COVID-19 global pandemic?
- What changed, if anything, when the university went remote during the COVID-19 pandemic?



Method

- Semi-structured interviews via Zoom with faculty writing group participants
- Principal investigator conducted all interviews, except for her own interview (participatory action research)
- Zoom interviews were automatically transcribed and then cleaned by twoperson review teams
- Participants were provided the opportunity to member-check their transcripts
- A two-person team manually coded the transcripts using constant comparison, an inductive coding approach
- Identified themes, standardized code definitions, revisited coding

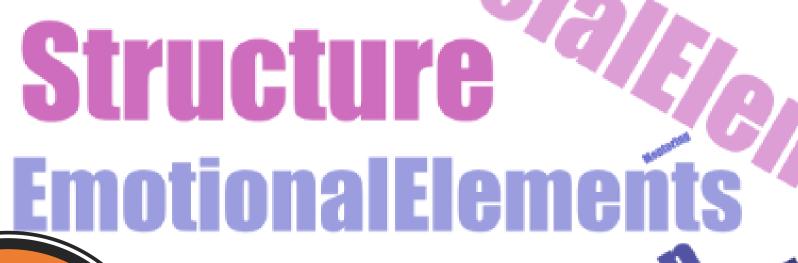


Method

Word Clouds







Themes for 'What We Expect'













Professional Schedule

Personal Schedule Time Productivity Social/Emotional Changes

Themes for **How Things** Changed with the Shutdown

What we've learned so far:

- Our participants really expected both professional outcomes as well as non-professional outcomes.
- The professional and social benefits far exceeded the participants' expectations, especially after the pandemic forced everyone into quarantine.
- Problems with participation in writing groups centered on scheduling and social discord.
- The changes due to the pandemic were primarily in time and scheduling and shifting focus in the new reality.



Next Steps (Call to Action)

- We want you to be aware that although a majority of faculty mentioned joining a writing group for the purposes of accountability and/or time consistency, what they unexpectedly also got was the social/emotional benefit of collegiality, community, and connectedness.
- As we become a more and more virtual world, the social/emotional aspects of working with others as we aim to produce and publish should not be overlooked.
- For some, during times of stress, catastrophe, or chaos, staying connected through a faculty writing group may serve just as great, if not a greater purpose, than being academically productive in an isolated environment.



Next Steps (Future Research)

- Our study was limited to faculty in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in The College of Teaching and Learning at Sam Houston State University.
 - Other departments within our college
 - Other colleges at our university
 - Other universities
- The difference between the perceived significance of faculty writing groups from the perspective of new vs. tenured professors
- The motivations, changes, benefits, and drawbacks of faculty writing groups as we merge back from a virtual to a face-to-face format



Q&A

• Everyone

