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 two-person 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

Structure

SocialElements

EmotionalElements

Collaboration

Productivity

Themes for 'What We Expect'

Codes for Realized Benefits of Faculty Writing Groups

Satisfaction
EditRevise
Confidence
CoAuthoring
Empowerment
Encouragement
Safety
Motivation
Advising
Community
Access
Perspective
Brainstorming
Relevance
Intertia
Support
Time
Consistency
DiversityAwareness
RoleModels
Voice

Productivity

SocialElements

Collaboration

PersonalGrowth

Mentorship

EmotionalElements

Structure

Themes for Realized Benefits of Faculty Writing Groups

Codes for Issues and Drawbacks of Faculty Writing Groups

PriorityShift
Time
DataParticipants
NoFunding
Fear
ShiftToSocial
Contracts
Stress
NotPrioritized
HomeLife
StoppedWriting
Disagreement
Teaching

Codes for How Things Changed with the Shutdown

OtherJobResponsibilities
Finances
LackofFocus
ChangeinFocus
LossofofficeHours
Fear
Children
Time
NoCommunity
Stress
MoreTime

Professional Schedule

Personal Schedule   Time   Productivity

Social

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