

**UWC-MU Writing Workshop
UMSAEP Partnerships Program 2013 Report
Rebecca Dingo & Enid Schatz**

University of Missouri Investigators:

Dr. Rebecca Dingo, Associate Professor, Department of English & Department of Women's and Gender Studies

Dr. Enid Schatz, Associate Professor, Department of Health Sciences & Department of Women's and Gender Studies

University of Western Cape Collaborators:

Vivienne Bozalek, Professor, Department of Social Work & Director of Teaching & Learning

Tamar Shefer, Professor of Women's and Gender Studies and Deputy Dean of Teaching and Learning

This grant was a collaboration between faculty and lecturers from the Women's and Gender Studies department/program and the Directorate of Teaching and Learning from MU and UWC. The aim of this trip was to lead a Writing Workshop for post-graduate students as a first step in the formation of a collaborative and online writing community to support post-graduate students in the writing of their theses/dissertations. Originally planned as a month-long writing institute at UWC for students and lecturers in Humanities, Women's and Gender Studies, Education, and Community and Health Sciences pursuing PhDs, the workshop was revised with the input of local collaborators to be a week-long intensive workshop. Despite the changes in format, the workshop still was intended to provide the following:

- new and more efficient means of preparing for and producing writing;
- a safe space in which to communicate about the impediments to completing writing projects; and
- a support network for regularly reinforcing good writing practices.

Students who participated in this program had the option to continue in a pilot online writing community. We are still working on creating a platform to host this online writing community. In the meantime, a Facebook group has been created to provide a virtual meeting place, and Google Drive/Dropbox has been used to provide resources that facilitate ongoing writing support for its participants.

This on-site writing workshop was the first step in ultimately creating an on-going, distance learning writing community that will provide continued support and feedback for those at UWC post-grad students who attended the workshop. Additionally, we are working together to develop a feminist on-line pedagogy that will be implemented as part of the online writing program. Development of this pedagogy also will result in manuscripts that will we submit to top tier Women's Studies or Education journals; we intend to have the participants be co-authors on these publications as well.

Intended outcomes/objectives of the project

We had four core outcomes and objective to this project:

1. To provide students with tools and strategies to have a sustainable writing practice, which will allow them to more fluidly complete the writing necessary to complete their theses.
2. To help increase the number of PhDs granted at UWC and publications written by UWC lecturers by providing an interactive on-site writing institute and through an on-going online writing community for those pursuing PhDs in the women's and gender studies and the humanities;
3. To develop an online writing community through a workable on-line feminist distance education pedagogy that will ultimately help support UWC's goal to increase its number of completed PhDs and their publications; and
4. To use the results of writing institute and online writing community to develop a scholarly article (to be submitted to a tier one research journal) and further scholarship in the area of feminist online pedagogy and transnational feminism. This online writing community will continue for at least a year, if not longer.

During the trip (as discussed more fully below in the Impressions section), through providing the week-long intensive writing workshop, we met Objective 1. Objectives 2-4 are still in process. In order to measure Objective 2 results, which are difficult since it is not possible to know the speed/amount of publications without the workshop, we will check back in with the participants 6 months and 1 year from the time of the workshop to see whether they are continuing to use the skills/tools introduced and to gauge their impressions on how these tools affected the speed and quantity of writing they produced over the periods. Steps to accomplish Objective 3 are outlined in the Notes for further work below. Steps to accomplish Objective 4 will be met through continued collaboration, contact and meetings (via skype, google docs, etc.) of the four main collaborators.

Notes for further work:

1. Partner with MU's CWP (Campus Writing Program) to develop more writing supports, programs, and applicable pedagogies-- especially the online program and especially at the undergraduate level.
2. Work with MU's et@Mo to develop platform-- ideally by Sep 2013.
3. Collaborate (MU & UWC investigators) on the development of a feminist on-line pedagogy that will be implemented as part of the online writing program.
4. Write 1-2 manuscripts based on workshop and development of feminist online pedagogy to submit to top tier Women's Studies or Education journals. The four MU/UWC Faculty/Staff will be lead authors; we intend include the participants as co-authors where appropriate.
5. Make plans for future workshops with the possibility of expanding the online community to other members, create workshops given throughout the year with online course in between?

Impressions:

We have evidence that participants greatly benefited from the workshop; responses to our end of workshop survey (included) were overwhelmingly positive. Majority of the responders reported that they learned sustainable writing practices-- most notably by writing regularly and in small increments. Moreover, they reported learning about the longer writing process and they noted that they learned how the writing blocks and problems they encountered were not unique to their own writing struggles but actually were quite common among the other participants. This recognition spurred several of them to create two kinds of writing groups: a group of people who got together to actually write and then a group of people to peer review their work. One of the things several participants noted either in person or in the

end of workshop survey was that they would like our sustainable writing instruction to be coupled with inputs focusing on how to complete writing projects. Several of the participants seemed to be under the impression that writing a formal paper or chapter could happen in a short period of time (i.e. during the week-long workshop). However, as research has shown (see Boice, Strickland, Shilb, Bartholomew, among many others) that pressure to produce formal and publishable writing in a small period of time can lead to binge writing, avoiding writing (because sitting for a week of time and forcing yourself to write usually is frustrating and stressful) and over all is not a sustainable practice. For this reason, we would like to see a longer-term writing support system put in place that emphasizes sustainable writing alongside writing instruction that addresses the mechanics and structures of writing. Ideally, our workshop would work best if we worked with participants over a period of time. A model that might work would be to offer a year-long (or 6 months) workshop that is a mixture of online meetings and face-to-face meetings. The drawback to this model is likely to be that participants may find it to be too much work on top of their regular teaching, advising, and administrative positions; this workshop would help to teach writing strategies that work to produce writing regularly, bit-by-bit, sustainably. We suggest that UWC offers an incentive for faculty to participate; for example the institution could offer a course release, advising release, etc in exchange for doing the workshop *and* producing an article of thesis/dissertation chapter by the end. If we continue with this model the we think it makes sense to expand the workshop beyond Humanities, Women's and Gender Studies, Education, and Community and Health Sciences. We would like to continue to do the workshop but would like to expand the audience.

The following is a list skills we could focus on during future workshops:

1. The relationship between critical reading and writing-- how through critical reading (i.e. the core arguments and rhetorical moves published authors make *alongside* their core contribution to their field) writers can not only develop a stronger grasp of writing mechanics but also the ability to find their authorial voices and situate their work in their own wider fields.
2. The long-term process of writing an article/dissertation chapter-- from research, to developing a research question, analyzing data, to the actual writing of the article/chapter (brainstorming, thesis, writing analysis, parts of each section, revision, editing etc.).
3. Assisting/guiding participants in using peer review and dialoging with each other as critical readers.
3. Identifying an audience for participants' work (i.e. journal or other scholars).