

Assembling Multi-Institutional Writing Programs: Reimagining the English Major While Expanding Writing Studies

Steven Accardi, Nicholas Behm, and Peter Vandenberg

At our institutions, we are all experiencing decreases in enrollment, especially the English major. The Association of Departments of English's report recommends including more writing studies courses, a growth area, as well as professional writing certificates to increase enrollments, but such a revision to the major is not enough. To sustain programmatic viability, undergraduate writing programs must collaborate across institutional boundaries, cultivating partnerships with two-year colleges that create pathways to facilitate degree completion and leverage faculty expertise and institutional resources to offer appealing, relevant curricula. Such multi-institutional partnerships reimagine the English major and expand the reach of writing studies at the undergraduate level. The authors come from varied institutions—university, liberal arts college, and two-year college—yet, over the past five years, they have negotiated and sustained 2+2 direct transfer agreements between the two-year college and the four-year institutions. In this article, they detail how and why they made these agreements and their effects on their programs and enrollments. They hope their discussion provides a generative heuristic for four-year college and university WPAs to invent partnerships with nearby two-year college writing faculty that address their enrollment and programmatic needs.

In the United States, we are witnessing continuous declines in birthrates (Stack) and college enrollments (Fain), and a “precipitous decline in undergraduate English majors” (“A Changing Major” 1). In the preface of the Association of Departments of English’s (ADE) report on the English major, MLA Executive Director Paula Krebs exhorts the discipline “to use the data we have to make real changes,” such as linking the study of reading and the study writing in ways that engage students (“A Changing Major”). The report also details “enrollments in rhetoric courses remain strong [. . .], and rhetoric and composition, including professional and technical writing, still constitute promising areas for students to broaden and diversify their understanding of writing and to develop as writers” (20). The ADE Ad Hoc Committee on the English Major goes on to say that “professional

writing (modules, certificates, minors, parts of concentrations) may well offer departments an area for expansion and increased enrollments” (20). As a response to the declines, the committee “recommend[s] that departments give continued attention to writing studies and to its connection to other parts of the major” (23).

The report’s findings and these dire national trends present an exigency for writing studies faculty to encourage their colleagues in other areas of English to collaborate on revisions to their English major, designs that include a writing studies curricula, a growth area in English (2). But simply redesigning the English major to include more writing studies courses is not enough: “Departments struggling with enrollment [. . .] should be under no illusion that revising the major will be the panacea to their problems” (2). We argue that undergraduate English departments must collaborate across institutional boundaries, cultivating partnerships with two-year colleges that create pathways to facilitate degree completion, increase enrollment, and leverage faculty expertise and institutional resources to offer appealing, relevant curricula able to sustain programmatic viability.

In referring to *programs* throughout this manuscript, we acknowledge that curricular growth is the outcome of a long history in writing studies of expansion, the seemingly inevitable outcome of the swell in PhDs and scholarly productivity beginning in the last two decades of the last century (Bolin, Burmester, Faber, and Vandenberg). As the discipline flourished, the term *program* and *writing program administrator* expanded to reference the functions and scope of writing centers and writing across the curriculum initiatives (Babb). By 2016, the *CCCC Committee on the Major in Writing and Rhetoric* had identified 141 entities identified in the administrative taxonomy of Higher Ed as *programs*—courses of study leading to a degree or certificate. The wider field has embraced this definition; nowhere is that more evident than in the description of the *CCCC Writing Program Certificate of Excellence*: “As a term, ‘programs’ is intended to be capacious in its application,” the guidelines say, inviting nominations from more than a half-dozen different institutional mechanisms with writing at their center.

Our use of the term in this article does not ignore that in many institutions *writing program* typically references the two-course sequence required of first-year students; indeed, we embrace that use of the term as well. Rather, we explore the extent to which academic program expansion has and will continue to collide with powerful institutional and economic trends toward austerity—trends that put similar pressures on English programs and those upstart “independent writing programs” struggling in the wake of the 2008 recession and its implications for college enrollment (Matzen). As a consequence, we explore what might be the next stage in

a field committed to programmatic growth—articulation. We agree with Louise Wetherbee Phelps: “In these circumstances, resilience thinking requires not just adaptation, but also the opposite: invention, risk taking, and experimentation with bold and unconventional designs” (9). These circumstances may well necessitate building disciplinary bridges between institutions.

Judith Kearns and Brian Turner argue in both “No Longer Discourse Technicians: Redefining Place and Purpose in an Independent Canadian Writing Program” and “An Outsider’s Perspective: Curriculum Design and Strategies for Sustainability in a Canadian IWP” that creating such a curricular pathway with a two-year college infused their major with a sustainable enrollment.

Our senior courses are flourishing. Two of them, designated as requirements in the program, now have a steady supplemental enrollment; the others, designated as electives, have a reliable pool of students from which to draw. These increases come on top of consistently high enrollment in upper-level courses, so high, in fact, that our requests to deliver existing rhetoric courses and our proposals for new courses have been routinely granted. (Turner and Kearns 98-99)

Missing from their discussion of the partnership, however, are details of the pathway’s formation. In “No Longer Discourse Technicians,” they state, “When an opportunity arose to help construct a combined degree/diploma in communications, to be offered jointly between our university and a local community college, we seized it” (97). In “An Outsider’s Perspective,” they add, “when [the English Department chair] was approached by a local community college that offers a two-year diploma in Creative Communication, he recognized—as few others could have done, at that point—a potential complement to the work of CAW [Centre for Academic Writing]. He asked our Director to join the working group that eventually developed a cooperative venture between the two institutions” (Kearns and Turner 46-47). But how did that cooperative venture form? Why did the two-year college reach out to the university? What value did the partnership hold for the two-year college as well as the four-year institution? An explanation of how to form such a pathway as well as its value to each institution is critical for English departments to survive the current crisis of declines.

It would seem obvious in this moment that four-year colleges and universities would reach out to two-year colleges, in hopes of establishing direct transfer agreements that could bring new students into their major; however, what could four-year colleges and universities offer two-year colleges to incentivize such a partnership? Moreover, how does one go about

making these agreements? Many two-year colleges do not have a defined writing program or an identified WPA (Calhoon-Dillahunt 125). Who should one contact, how are these two-year writing programs organized, and how does one create a reciprocal relationship that benefits both institutions, programs, and students?

In this article, we address these questions, paying particular attention to the role and perspective of the two-year college. Kearns and Turner have already proven the successes of two-year/four-year partnerships, but very little is known about two-year college writing programs (Taylor 120), their structures, and incentives to partner. By understanding the particular needs of two-year college writing programs, we may begin to view writing programming as multi-institutional. Through a multi-institutional framework and assembling of partnerships, we may be able to help shape two-year college writing programs and reimagine the English major. In other words, if writing is a growth area within the declining English major and two-year college writing programs can be assembled to prepare and send interested writing studies students to four-year institutions, we may be headed toward a growth and rearticulation of the English major.

The authors of this article come from varied institutions: a large, private urban university with an independent writing department, a small, private suburban liberal arts college with a traditional English department, and the largest, public two-year college in the sixth most populous state with an unorganized writing program. Over the past five years, we have negotiated and sustained 2+2 direct transfer agreements between the two-year college and the four-year institutions. In this article, we discuss how and why we made these agreements and their effects on our programs and enrollments. We hope our discussion provides a generative heuristic for four-year college and university WPAs to invent partnerships with nearby two-year college writing faculty that address their enrollment and programmatic needs. First, we overview what two-year college writing programs typically look like across the nation and why faculty in those unorganized writing programs may be interested in forming partnerships. Second, we address how forming multi-institutional partnerships are beneficial to both the sending and receiving institutions, programs, and students. Third, we discuss our process and approach to forming these 2+2 direct transfer agreements with our programs and administrators and reveal some of our early successes with these partnerships. Finally, we conclude by suggesting how these partnerships not only have the potential to reimagine our English major but also could grow and strengthen the field of writing studies at the undergraduate level.

WRITING PROGRAMS AT THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

Tim Taylor argues that two-year college writing programs are “largely invisible to the profession as a whole—many of us know little about them” (Taylor 120). This lack of knowledge makes it difficult for WPAs at four-year institutions to know how to approach and partner with a two-year college writing program. Carolyn Calhoun-Dillahunt argues that “[i]n two-year college English departments, writing courses tend to make up the majority of the course offerings” (121). There is first-year writing, and likely, developmental writing, and possibly even advanced or professional writing courses. Jeffery Andelora agrees and goes one step further, asserting that unlike four-year colleges and universities “two-year college English departments aren’t built around literary studies, nor do they have writing programs—they are writing programs” (qtd. in Taylor 129). While there is no doubt that two-year colleges have many course offerings in writing, some take issue with Andelora’s assertion, questioning whether two-year colleges indeed have writing *programs*.

According to the National Census of Writing, 82% of participating two-year colleges report having an “official writing program” (“Does your”); yet, only 11% say that they have a WPA administering it (“Who has”). This disparity, a “program” without a WPA, leaves some interrogating the definition of an “official writing program” at the two-year college (Klausman, “Toward” 263). Jeffery Klausman, who has written extensively on two-year college writing programs over the last ten years, argues that without a WPA, two-year colleges simply do not have a writing program, but rather “a collection of writing classes” (Klausman, “Mapping” 239).

Even with a WPA, the necessary professionalizing of writing faculty at the two-year college is a challenge. Unlike four-year colleges and universities, in which a WPA has a teacher/student relationship with their graduate student TAs, at the two-year college the relationship is peer-to-peer (244). In other words, two-year college WPAs cannot always simply *teach* their teachers rhetoric and writing theory and pedagogy; they often have to *professionalize* their peers, and they must do so in an English subfield in which their peers may not specialize. An additional challenge is that two-year college writing faculty often “resist” this professionalizing, arguing that they “*are* experienced teachers” (Calhoun-Dillahunt 123) and sometimes invoke “academic freedom” (Klausman, “The Two-Year” 386), that they have the right to teach what they want to teach and how they teach it. Of course, every two-year college English department is different, but knowing the baseline trends when learning about how one’s nearby two-year college’s

English department is organized and operates is critical before inventing arguments for a multi-institutional partnership.

THE BENEFITS OF MULTI-INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Upon first glance there might not seem to be any incentives for two-year college writing faculty to negotiate a 2+2 direct transfer agreement with a four-year institution. After all, as Turner and Kearns demonstrate, it is the four-year institution's faculty that stand to benefit by way of increased enrollments. Specifically, it is their coveted upper division courses that are likely to see an uptick in head counts. Such an increase provides the grounds for four-year institution faculty to redesign their English major to include more writing studies course offerings. Nevertheless, there are many reasons why two-year college writing faculty should be willing to partner.

First, four-year institutions can provide a framework for an official writing program that most two-year colleges do not have. Using those frameworks, two-year colleges could assemble a comprehensive sequenced writing program that fits their local institution, which may prompt the need for more writing courses, providing writing faculty with more course options to teach beyond first-year writing. Once a program is constructed and poised to send prepared and interested students to the receiving school's program, the two-year college could argue for a WPA position to facilitate such a program. Two-year college faculty are generally limited to the role of teacher and are often expected to teach more than their four-year counterparts; creating a new role for writing faculty would be a welcomed addition (Accardi and Grauman 76).

Next, two-year colleges, like four-year institutions, have been suffering enrollment losses for the past ten years ("Community College Enrollment"). An organized multi-institutional writing program that seamlessly guided students from one institution to the next, from one degree to the next, could increase enrollments at both institutions. According to guided pathways advocates Thomas Bailey, Shanna Smith Jaggars, and David Jenkins, two-year colleges are currently designed like cafeterias. The open access mission of the college "provide[s] a wide variety of students with a wide variety of goals" a wide variety of choices, that is, courses, programs, credentials (Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins 13). However, "the typical student is overwhelmed by the many choices available, resulting in poor program or course selections decisions, which in turn cost time and money, and likely lead many students to drop out in frustration" (22). Many students choose to complete as many general education courses as possible at the two-year-college-cost before transferring, but they soon discover that only some of

these courses count toward their intended major at some institutions while others get marked as electives. Not wanting to “make more mistakes,” students leave without completing their associate degree, choosing to take courses “that count” at their transfer school instead. Leaving before graduating negatively impacts the two-year college’s graduation rates, a measurement of success that is frequently tied to financial rewards (Gold and Albert 89). The higher the graduation rates, the greater the state and federal subsidies, which in turn allow for “more generous financial aid to students” thereby attracting more students and tuition dollars to the college (Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins 5).

Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins argue that two-year colleges should carve out clear paths in the dense forest of choice. That way, students could explore these routes while making sure their time and money is not wasted. The critique to this narrow path-making is course reduction. The “unnecessary courses,” those not on a program’s path, for example, special topics courses, are eliminated or effectively no longer enroll. However, in the case of assembling new multi-institutional writing programs, new courses would be created, not eliminated. The pathway could even lead to the construction of a transferable writing certificate, which could encourage more students to enroll in more writing studies courses, thereby boosting enrollment at the two-year college as well as the four-year institution. The 2+2 direct transfer agreement structure incentivizes students to stay at the two-year college for two years, and all but assures the completion of their associate degree. In short, the partnership pathway retains students, boosting enrollment at both institutions and writing programs.

Finally, many two-year college students cannot afford to attend four-year institutions for a variety of reasons, for example, cost, transcript limitations, or family obligations. Two-year colleges function as their best, or only, choice for a college education. As a result, some students are resentful of their constrained situation and even ashamed of their two-year college identity. The 2+2 agreement communicates to two-year college students, perhaps for the first time, that they are wanted, that a four-year institution, with an elevated ethos, wants them at their school and wants them in their program. To follow the pathway is a powerful identity shift. Once committed to the agreement, students are identified as four-year university students, who are completing the first two years of their major at the two-year college. Similarly, two-year college writing programs are elevated by the university writing program’s status. The partnership communicates that a four-year college or university has invested in the two-year college writing program and desires a quality of student that the two-year college writing

program produces. Students are persuaded by that ethos and are likely to enroll in the program.

Beyond increasing two-year and four-year English enrollments, inventing and assembling multi-institutional writing programs could better connect and expand our field. Two-year and four-year writing faculty could work together to design and revise writing studies courses that best prepare students for the twenty-first century. Writing studies programs and WPA positions could be created at two-year colleges, while English bachelor's degree requirements could be revised to include more writing courses at four-year institutions. In sum, the field of writing studies could have a greater presence at the undergraduate level and would no longer be fragmented by institutional type but rather enhanced through multi-institutional writing programs.

OUR PROCESS

For the past several years, we have negotiated, created, and facilitated partnerships connecting the two-year and four-year institutions described above. From this experience, we have identified a process that could be applied to others' institutional conditions and needs; but first, we explain our institutional contexts and programmatic needs.

Steve is a professor of English at College of DuPage (COD), the largest two-year college in Illinois, located 25 miles west of Chicago, which serves approximately 25,000 students per semester. In 2015, when Steve was hired, enrollments had been declining for four straight semesters ("Students in English"). English enrollments were down 2% ("Enrollments in English"). The department was almost entirely made of faculty with training in either literature or creative writing who were expected to teach first-year writing as well as their area of expertise. There were three professional writing courses—"Writing in the Workplace," "Technical Writing," and "Writing for the Web"—that were part of a multidisciplinary 24.0-credit-hour technical communication certificate. Unfortunately, the courses were so poorly enrolled that the certificate was deactivated the year before and was slated to be terminated. In the ten years that it was active, the certificate only graduated nine students. Steve speculated that if the certificate was revised, scaled back from 24.0 hours to 18.0 hours; housed exclusively in English; and made to offer current writing studies courses, it could be relaunched, rather than terminated, bringing new enrollments into English. The necessary framework and justification for this curriculum overhaul was a four-year writing program willing to invest its time and support

to collaborate on a new two-year writing studies program that would map onto its four-year major.

Nick is a professor of English at Elmhurst University, which is located approximately 10 miles northeast of COD. In 2015, Elmhurst was a small liberal arts college of approximately 3,200 undergraduate and graduate students, but elevated its name to Elmhurst University in 2020 to more accurately represent academic program offerings. As has been the national trend at a majority of small liberal arts institutions, enrollment in English at Elmhurst University has been trending lower for several years, decreasing approximately 10–15% from 2011–2018, as tracked by the college's Office of Information Services ("Data Book: 2015-2016" and "Data Book: 2019–2020"). In 2014, the institution eliminated its MA program in English Studies because of a lack of enrollment, an effect of school districts eliminating reimbursement for high school English teachers completing graduate credits. Enrollments in 300-level and 400-level English courses at the time were dramatically declining as well. And it was not just English or other Humanities disciplines feeling the pinch. Still reeling from the Great Recession, the institution was financially unstable and engaged in a number of unpopular financial decisions, like cutting retirement contributions, laying off lecturers and visiting professors, and eliminating benefits, to balance budgets. Morale across the institution was at a nadir.

Nick was looking for ways to increase enrollments in the English major, which already had three tracks (English education, literature, and writing), but particularly in writing. Such an increase in English-writing majors could provide an opportunity to redesign the English major, in favor of more writing studies courses, and to demonstrate the relevance of writing studies to skeptical students and parents. Moreover, Nick has long believed that the small liberal arts institutions most likely to survive the various financial crises and the impending dramatic decrease in student enrollment are those that cultivate strategic partnerships with two-year colleges. A majority of liberal arts institutions face apocalyptic financial challenges, and to survive, faculty and administrators must think creatively about academic programming and degree-completion pathways that are responsive to students' needs. Partnering with College of DuPage presented an opportunity to demonstrate the value of such strategic partnerships for both schools and for the English department at Elmhurst University in particular.

Pete is a professor of writing, rhetoric, and discourse (WRD) at DePaul University in Chicago. WRD is the only independent writing program in the Chicagoland area, offering both a BA and MA in the field of writing studies. Like COD and Elmhurst, DePaul's English major had been

experiencing steady declines in enrollment, but relative to WRD, continued to enjoy comparatively strong first-year and transfer declarations owing to the familiarity of “English” as an established college major. Attracting students to the writing and rhetoric major has been a perennial challenge since the units separated in 2007. An exclusive attention to British and American literature in the English Major Course Recommendations of the Illinois Articulation Initiative effectively obscured the writing and rhetoric major as a transfer option. When Steve laid out the pathway opportunity for Pete, the prospects for a positive, mutual relationship between the two departments was obvious. COD English would be able to show students a tangible, local option to carry investment in writing studies past the associates degree to the BA, while the writing and rhetoric major in WRD would have access to motivated students already well prepared to excel in upper-division core courses, where enrollments were lagging.

Similar to the two-year college faculty in Turner and Kearns’s partnership, it was Steve who reached out to both Pete and Nick. It took approximately a year to establish an agreement with Elmhurst, which ended up being three agreements, and then about a semester to create one with DePaul. We detail our process below. Central to our experience is the recognition that faculty-to-faculty, unit-to-unit negotiation is the first step in the process of a successful partnership. Not only are faculty—as content experts and program designers—best equipped to mitigate the differences in course designs and programs, but administrators at higher levels have limited perspective to understand and weigh the details of course objectives and outcomes. Having moved through college themselves with the understanding that *English* largely equals *literature*, staff professionals in offices of two-year college partnerships simply cannot be expected to envision or lead such efforts.

First, we suggest starting with what both institutions have in common: low enrollments. Steve had a certificate that was about to be terminated. Nick had a degree that already was terminated. Pete faced limited transfer and first-year declarations in an environment facing the “prioritization of academic programs” (Dickeson 21). Our experience encourages us to propose that, before envisioning desired outcomes, those motivated to explore multi-institutional pathways look with clear eyes at what is not working in one’s own programs to best recognize what might work across both institutions.

Second, move toward what can be offered. Steve could offer students, but with the right multi-institutional design and support, he could offer well-prepared and interested writing studies students. These students would have completed all their 100- and 200-level courses for the major, so upon

transfer they would immediately increase enrollment in the 300- and 400-level courses. Nick and Pete could offer collaborating effort and support on a multi-institutional writing studies program. Such a program could provide Steve and his colleagues with new or revised course offerings in rhetoric and writing, which could lead to a new credential. Such a program could also cue the need for a WPA, a new role beyond teacher for the oft limited two-year college writing faculty (Accardi and Grauman 76). The new program with new courses would also justify new hires in writing studies. Nick and Pete could lend the two-year college writing program and its students their ethos—a mark of investment and credibility that could bring about new enrollments—generating a sense of belonging and destination that students desire.

Next, negotiate courses. Examine course descriptions and content and syllabi. See which courses align. Could any 200-level courses at the two-year college count for 300-level courses at the four-year institution? Should any two-year college courses count toward the major's core courses? Are there any courses missing at the two-year college that could be created for the partnership? For the Elmhurst agreement, Steve was able to revise the old 100-level professional writing courses into Workplace Writing, Technical Writing, and Digital Writing and create new 200-level courses: Writing in the Professions, Professional Editing, Writing in the Community, and Advanced Composition. Based on their collaborative efforts, Nick and Steve were able to negotiate Writing in the Professions for Elmhurst's 300-level Business and Technical Writing course. For the DePaul agreement, Steve's colleague was able to revise "Introduction to Writing and Reading Center Theory and Practice" into "Writing Center Theory and Practice" while Steve was able to create Argumentative Writing at the 200-level. With the revision, Pete and Steve negotiated COD's 100-level Technical Writing and Digital Writing courses for DePaul's 200-level courses by the same name and counted COD's 200-level Professional Editing course for DePaul's 300-level Editing course. Both Nick and Pete refrained from having any of COD's writing studies courses count for their major's core courses, arguing that such courses are designed in part to condition students to localized programmatic visions. Remember that each school would like more students to take more courses at their institution; however, the more courses that students could take at the two-year-college-price, the greater they are incentivized to follow the agreement.

Once the courses are mapped, then take the articulated agreement to departmental chairs and colleagues for review and feedback. Review steps one through three with them so that they understand what the problem is, what is at stake, what can be offered, and how the partnership could

improve the program. For example, Nick met with his department chair and Steve met with his associate dean (COD did not have an English department chair at the time). Both were excited by the plans and prospects of a partnership. Shortly thereafter, the four met at COD to review the details and in the process, sketched out two more agreements, mirroring Elmhurst's three English tracks for the major (literature, education, and writing).

Once colleagues are informed and onboard, take the agreed upon partnership to administrators. Administrators beyond the home unit typically view enrollments in aggregate; at the college level and beyond, cumulative headcount and credit hours mean more than which major students call "home." That is why it is so important at the unit-level to work out those details faculty-to-faculty. Upon finalizing all three tracks, Nick and Steve scheduled a meeting at Elmhurst with colleagues and administrators from COD and Elmhurst to discuss institutional details, such as a tuition freeze once a student starts the agreement or a fifth semester at COD. (Both initiatives did not come to fruition.) Steve and Pete worked with their administrators individually, informing them of the plan and partnership and then having them coordinate with each other to finalize the agreement.

After completing the agreement,¹ the next step is to promote it. One of the mistakes Steve and Nick made was assuming that both institutions would promote the partnership avidly. After a semester without any marketing materials or even an announcement, Steve contacted the dean of liberal arts and COD marketing to start making the pathway visible to students. Learning from this mistake, Steve worked with Pete to promote the agreement right after signing. Pete visited COD English courses to talk with students personally about the partnership. He produced marketing materials from DePaul, the semester-by-semester sequence of coursework, and the benefits of following the agreement beyond financial, such as access to DePaul's library system and advisors while attending COD. Afterward, Pete had a story about the partnership published on WRD's blog and circulated it on social media. Steve had COD marketing produce flyers and post them around campus and email them to students and faculty. A marketing challenge at two-year colleges is that the audience turns over quickly, so constant promotion is necessary.

EARLY SUCCESSES

As a result of these partnerships and promotion, we have seen some early success. First and foremost, we have seen enrollment increases in our programs. At COD, despite English declining overall, writing studies has

started to grow. The new program was launched in academic year 2017–2018 and the new partnerships were promoted in 2018–2019, thus making AY2019–2020 the first year to observe its effects. Writing studies began with 493 students, dipped by 5.2% the following year to 467 students, and then with the promoted partnerships, increased by 15.2% to 538 students (“English Course Enrollments”). English (excluding writing studies), over the same period of time, declined similarly by 4.5% but then again by 2.8% (“English Course Enrollments”).

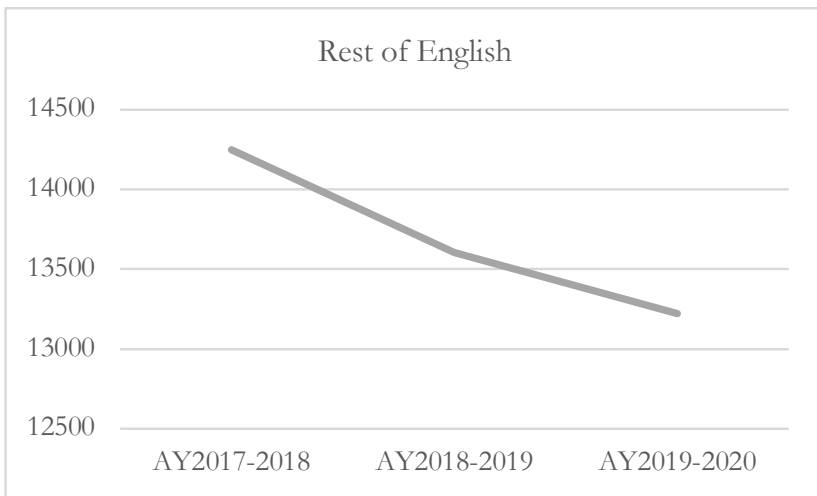
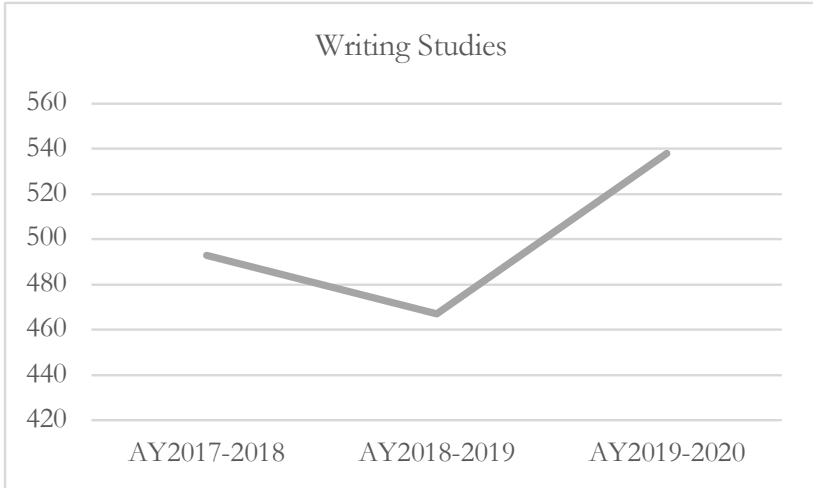


Figure 1. Writing Studies Compared to the Rest of English Enrollments.

At Elmhurst, enrollments in English have stabilized the last two years, and the partnership with COD is credited with helping significantly with that stabilization. In 2011, as noted by Elmhurst College's Office of Information Services, the English department boasted 121 undergraduate majors, but enrollment dropped precipitously in subsequent years ("Data Book: 2015-2016"). In 2015, just prior to the agreement with the COD, enrollment had declined to 80 majors, so the English department at Elmhurst was desperate to find ways to staunch the losses ("Data Book: 2015-2016"). The chart below outlines the precipitous declines.

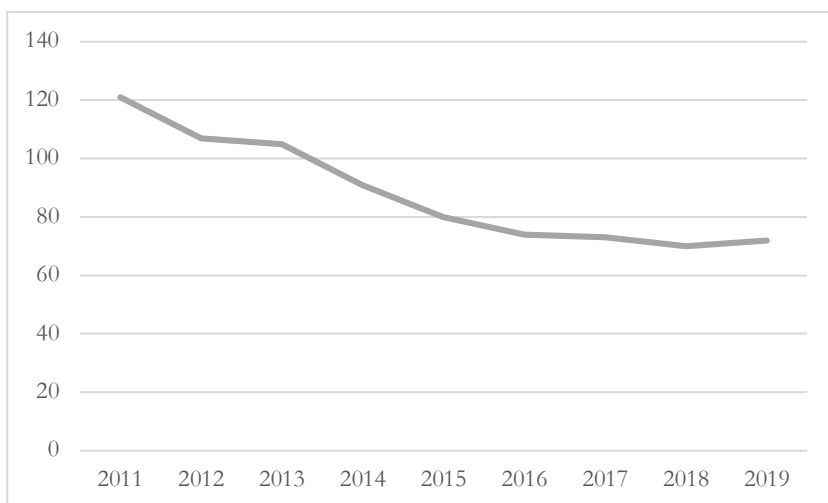


Figure 2. English Enrollment at Elmhurst University

As the Figure 2 shows, according to Elmhurst's Office of Information Services, major numbers began to stabilize after the 2+2 agreement with COD, and that agreement has played a fundamental role in ensuring that stabilization ("Data Book: 2019-2020").

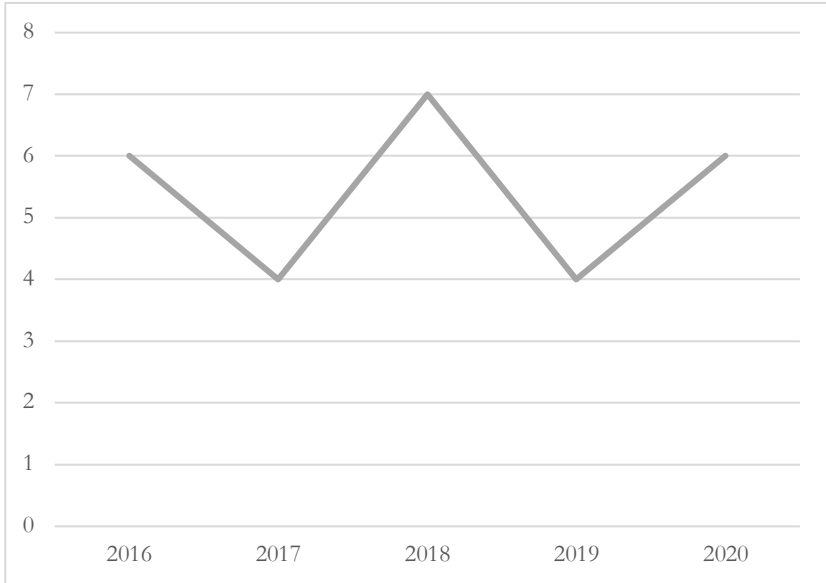


Figure 3. Transfer Students from College of DuPage

The significance of the 2+2 partnership with COD is even more apparent when compared to recent data showing the total number of enrolled transfer students to the English department. In 2019, for instance, the English department had eighteen transfer students enroll in the English major; four of those eighteen were transfer students from COD (Anderson). In 2020, the proportion of COD transfer students to all enrolled transfer students was even more pronounced; of the thirteen total transfer students who enrolled as English majors in the fall of 2020, six transferred from COD (Anderson; Office of Information Services, “Data Book: 2019-2020”).

The partnership between COD and DePaul is much newer than the one between COD and Elmhurst; it is too early to judge the potential impact on the major in writing and rhetoric. The significant differences between the English department at Elmhurst and WRD at DePaul makes the former a less than reliable predictor of transfer students for the latter. Elmhurst is dramatically smaller than either COD or DePaul, but it is physically much closer to COD and shares a suburban location. WRD teaches all its major courses at DePaul’s Lincoln Park campus, along Lake Michigan, just two miles north of Chicago’s downtown. DePaul is more than an hour’s drive from COD, and close to three hours by train. Students who stay at the two-year college long enough to earn an associate degree may not want

to make a transition to campus living as juniors, nor wish to spend as much time on the road (or the tracks) as they do in class while approaching four-year graduation. While those of us in writing studies recognize DePaul's writing and rhetoric major as highly desirable, for many current COD transfer students, it may be neither feasible nor viable.

Further, internal competition for COD students who choose DePaul, which offers some 95 discrete undergraduate programs across nine colleges, puts a program like writing and rhetoric at a significant disadvantage. While English at Elmhurst is an omnibus program, offering opportunities in creative writing, journalism, and literature as well as writing studies, most of those options are offered in other units at DePaul. WRD projects a fairly narrow pathway by comparison to the wealth of choices the school makes available. For example, in fall 2020, DePaul welcomed a recent stand-out student at COD—the first ever to publish in *Young Scholars in Writing*—but she matriculated at DePaul in Data Science, in the College of Science and Health, where her two-year college coursework in writing studies will no doubt serve her very well.

It will take some time to see strong results from the pathway created between COD's writing studies program and DePaul's major in writing and rhetoric. This particular transfer arrangement will be successful to the extent that COD becomes accomplished in drawing students into writing studies as first-year students and sustaining them through two years of study. The challenges of travel and culture-shift are likely to be least significant for the two-year transfer student who becomes initiated to the discipline across multiple courses and accumulates a sufficient number of transferable credits to make the move to DePaul feasible and desirable.

While the COD-Elmhurst partnership has seen positive results already, the pathway from COD to DePaul is a long game. We understood this at the outset, and the lack of an immediate payoff was not as distinctive. As the program at COD gains prominence, and intake advisors come to recognize writing studies as an attractive option for retaining students, the pathway to completion at DePaul becomes more useful to both schools. The faculty-to-faculty connection discussed above is crucial to such an arrangement. Driven as they must be by return on investment, large, bureaucratic universities would likely be unwilling to invest significantly in or wait on long-term pathway development. We have found, however, that this unit-level work has been both supported and openly valued by deans and enrollment management officials at both schools. While the pathway's value to WRD in terms of headcount and credit-hours has been slim to date, the agreement has benefitted both departments in demonstrating a favorable administrative posture—awareness of and attention to strategy and tactics

critical to sustaining institutional health. We believe this proactive, institutionally aligned position will elevate the profiles of our programs and lengthen the runway necessary to get the agreement off the ground.

As a result of these partnerships, Steve was able to halt the deactivation of the technical communication certificate and relaunch it as a newly designed professional writing certificate. The certificate was promoted and brought in new students, returning students interested in advancing or changing their careers and first-time students interested in writing as a profession. The certificate courses transferred directly into Elmhurst and DePaul's writing programs, as well, incentivizing students to complete their AA, earn the additional credential, and have all their English coursework count toward their BA degree.

In addition, the new certificate afforded Steve a new role, as coordinator of the certificate, and the supported reassigned time. As coordinator, Steve had access to Perkins funding, which he used to create a collegewide lecture series on professional writing. The series promoted the certificate and partnerships every semester, bringing in new students. Finally, the certificate won the 2020 Diana Hacker TYCA Outstanding Program in English Award. The national recognition was promoted and again brought in new students. In short, with the structure and support of the four-year institution, the two-year college was able to increase enrollments at both institutions.

Since its launch in fall of 2017, enrollment in the certificate has grown every semester. In its three years of operation, enrollment has more than doubled, an increase of 130%, and has already produced ten certificate graduates, one more than the previous certificate generated in ten years of operation.

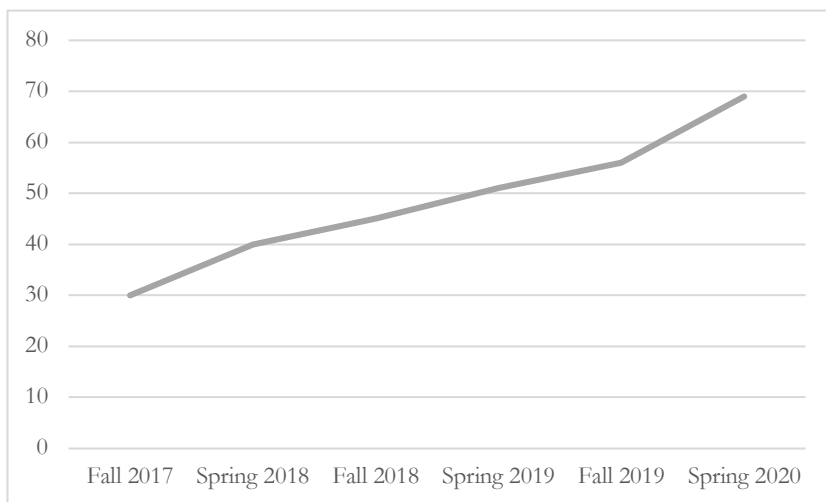


Figure 4. Professional Writing Certificate Enrollment

Beyond enrollment increases, the partnerships shaped a multi-institutional writing studies program. Theoretically sound courses were created and sequenced into curricula, some in professional writing and others in rhetoric and writing, clearing the way for a direct path to a four-year degree.

CONCLUSION

What we have collaborated on is not exceptional but rather replicable. We are all experiencing decreases in enrollment, especially the English major. The ADE report recommends more writing studies courses (“A Changing Major” 23), rhetoric and writing, professional writing, and certificates (20), but revision to the major is not enough (2). Two-year colleges and four-year institutions must collaborate on sustainable partnerships and curricular pathways. Kearns and Turner have already proven the successes of such partnerships and we are beginning to experience them, too.

Reaching out across institutional boundaries to cultivate partnerships can begin from either direction, as the benefits are mutual: enrollment increases, contemporary curricula, new roles, perhaps even new hires, credentials, and funding. It is an act that may not only slow down the English major’s decline but also increase the reach of writing studies at the undergraduate level. Most importantly, a larger writing studies footprint at the two-year college will improve student writing and the teaching of writing at all levels.

Notes

1. 2+2 *Academic Plan: COD Associate in Arts to EC Bachelor of Arts in English—Writing Track*. 2017, https://www.cod.edu/academics/transfer/pdf/two_plus_two/Elmhurst_englishwriting_academic_plan.pdf and *College of DuPage—DePaul University College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences: Associate of Arts with a Focus in Rhetoric and Writing Degree to the Bachelor of Arts in Writing, Rhetoric and Discourse*. 2018, https://www.cod.edu/academics/transfer/pdf/two_plus_two/aa_wrd_plan.pdf

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Steven Accardi is professor of English at College of DuPage and serves as chair of COD's writing studies program. His scholarship has been published in *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, *Composition Studies*, *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, and the *Journal of Second Language Writing*. His forthcoming project addresses the disciplinary knowledge gaps of first-year writing instructors and the ineffectiveness of faculty development.

Nicholas Behm is professor of English and director of the center for scholarship and teaching at Elmhurst University where he teaches first-year composition, rhetorical theory, and business and technical writing courses. He publishes and presents scholarship that complicates composition pedagogy and theory, writing assessment, and critical race theory. With Greg Glau, Deborah Holdstein, Duane Roen, and Ed White, he is co-editor of *The WPA Outcomes Statement—A Decade Later*, which won the 2013 “Best Book Award” from the CWPA. With Duane Roen and Sherry Rankins-Robertson, he is co-editor of *The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing: Scholarship and Applications*.

Peter Vandenberg is professor of writing, rhetoric, and discourse and executive associate dean of the college of liberal arts and social sciences at DePaul University in Chicago. He is the co-editor of three books, including *Keywords in Writing Studies*, and has published and spoken in a broad range of venues across a thirty-year career in rhetoric and composition.

