The HBCU Versus the PWI Write on Site: Considering Faculty Outcomes

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The phrase "publish or perish" has become a mantra in research oriented academic settings, reflecting a form of academic Darwinism for tenure and promotion decisions heavily influenced by publication records. This is compounded by the fact that some new academics view the three primary components of faculty work: teaching, research and service, singularly and in isolation as opposed to integrated tasks (Boice, 2000). Writing groups may offer a strategy for faculty developers and other administrators interested in ameliorating these potential challenges via programs geared toward increasing faculty writing productivity. The following reviews literature related to faculty writing groups and describes the featured initiative, Write on Site.

Review of Literature

Postsecondary faculties are expected to teach (which includes student advising and mentoring), participate in community service, and publish. New faculty may face challenges balancing these responsibilities and in the midst of their juggling act drop the ball on writing and publishing. Boice (1990) identified other causes of faculty writing problems such as lack of time, internal censors, fear of failure, perfectionism, procrastination, early writing experiences, personality types, and attitudes. Due to the need for academics to publish for promotion or tenure and to contribute knowledge through scholarship, many universities implement interventions to help faculty become more productive. Initiatives employed to promote increased productivity include writing groups, writing retreats, and writing workshops.

Lee and Boud (2003) led two writing groups for their academic staff to provide developmental intervention. One group focused on new researchers' needs and the other on that of experienced researchers. Both groups met weekly for two hours with combined workshops and individual consultation to foster collaboration. Key factors that emerged from this study were mutuality, ongoing research, as well as professional identity and desire.   Friend and Gonzalez (2009) also led a writing group for non-tenured and tenured faculty centered on providing support and mentorship for scholarly writing. Meetings were held monthly to critique five pages of writing with peers. This writing experience helped faculty strengthen relationships with colleagues, improve time management, and schedule adequate time for writing. Similarly, Bone, McMullen, and Clarke (2009) reported on a writing group that met monthly for two hours to discuss different topics. These topics included choosing a conference or a journal to submit publications, writing an abstract, writing with authority, and dealing with writer's block. This group resulted in a learning community on writing practices. Gillespie and colleagues' (2005) work featured a research circle which gathered every two weeks in groups of three or four to critique three pages of academic writing. Participants were given a stipend to participate in the writing group. The research circle helped participants build a scholarly identity in the context of collegial interaction and engagement.

Writing workshops and retreats also help academics overcome writing barriers and increase research productivity. Belcher (2009) facilitated a ten week, three hour workshop for students and faculty. The workshop focused on writing for publication, the process of writing, procrastination, reading journal

articles, and learning the macro aspects of writing. At the end of this workshop, participants completed articles and submitted them to professional journals.

The Sisters of the Academy Research Boot Camp includes elements of the aforementioned writing interventions. The goal of this week-long workshop centers upon enhancing the research skills, writing productivity, and professional networks of doctoral candidates and junior faculty members. Senior faculty members facilitate workshops and mentor each participant to address dissertation or manuscript completion. Participants benefit by having individual and group writing sessions, as well as coaching towards their writing goals throughout the week from more experienced academics.

During another initiative, Moore (2003) describes a five day writer's retreat for twelve faculty members. The purpose of this workshop was to create an atmosphere of trust for productive writing; help participants learn from each other; create a multidisciplinary community of writers; explore links between teaching, research, writing, and scholarship; and to have a productive writing experience in which each participant achieved a specific writing goal. The faculty members were all writers wanting to enhance their writing skills. During the retreat, participants participated in a daily, one hour workshop on the writing process and had shared writing time, as well as individual writing sessions. Participants reported that the retreat helped remove insecurity and isolation from writing and played a role in their significant progress on writing projects.

Writing groups, retreats, and workshops all have the potential to impact participants positively and increase productivity. Working with others may also have pitfalls. Some potential pitfalls include competitiveness (Phillips, Sweet, & Blythe, 2009), unpleasant past experiences (Gillespie et al., 2005), and pressures associated with deadlines (Moore, 2003). Although these pitfalls may exist, the positive outcomes outweigh the negative. Overall, faculty who participated in these programs strengthened relationships with colleagues, increased knowledge of research and writing, and increased their productivity.

Three Write on Site Models

The first author holds experience conducting various writing programs. The most successful of these are her development of Write on Site groups. Write on Site comprises writers who agree to meet at specific locations for the primary purpose of writing. Unlike traditional writing groups, there is no exchange or critique from other group members on writing projects. The primary purpose of the group centers upon prompting output and productivity via providing a space of others engaged in the same act: that of writing.

Write on Site may be implemented in three ways. In Model One, Rockquemore Style (which bears the last name of the scholar who shared this idea with the first author), scholars write and only write for two hours straight. Participants hold little knowledge of others' writing topics or progress beyond that shared during casual conversation prior to and following the meeting. Because of this, it is not considered a formal accountability group. However, the act of meeting itself arguably may serve as a type of informal accountability for some. Writing sessions are held off campus, and in Dr. Rockquemore's case, at a local coffee shop.

With Model Two, or the Davis Hybrid Model, the first segment of the meeting consists of an optional 15 to 30 minute "check in" where participants either report on their progress or share writing tips with

others. The remaining two hours focus upon writing. This model includes both on and off campus components. However, the majority of sessions are held on campus in a conference room. Off campus sessions have taken place at local venues or nationally through organized group writing retreats.

Model Three combines both the Rockquemore and Davis formats in that it reflects Model Two the first and second weeks of the month. However, on the third and fourth weeks writers move to Model One, writing continuously for two hours without check-in or accountability time. Though the facilitator proposed this option to groups in the past, none have taken it as of yet.

The following summarizes the three aforementioned models:

Three Write on Site Models				
Model Type	Collective Writing Time	Verbal Accountability	On Campus	Off Campus
1. Rockquemore Style	✓			✓
2. Davis Hybrid Model	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. Davis and Rockquemore Model	✓	✓	✓	✓

Figure 1. The three Write on Site models.

Write on Site groups may also agree upon ground rules for each session. For instance, scholars may choose an open environment in terms of noise level versus collaborators meeting at other points of the week so as not to disturb non-collaborating group members. Writers often agree upon established participation guidelines, such as a drop-in policy versus participating for all or a determined portion of the semester. Such agreements minimize the likelihood of unattended writing sessions.

Reflection

The first author's initial experience forming and facilitating a Write on Site group was during her work as an assistant professor at a predominantly White institution (PWI). Despite an invitation to a racially mixed group of colleagues, only African Americans responded and participated in the group. The five individuals consisted of two junior faculty members, two postdoctoral fellows, and one doctoral fellow. The group met regularly and was amazingly productive. After the first semester, each participant submitted one to two manuscripts for publication in refereed journals and at least one conference proposal. The next semester had the same results in terms of productive outcomes.

While her first Write on Site group was held at a predominantly White university, the first author now facilitates a group at her current institution, a historically Black university (HBCU). Many internal questions arose as she prepared to invite Write on Site participants from her new HBCU home. Would Write on Site have the same momentum as it did at the PWI? Would colleagues at the HBCU embrace the idea?

The initial response from faculty at the HBCU was strong. Twelve people from throughout the College of Education attended. As the semester proceeded, a core group of five racially diverse faculty members continued to meet regularly. The key difference between the PWI and HBCU groups was the degree of

productivity of participants. With the exception of this collaborative article, no other member of the HBCU group submitted papers at the end of the program's first semester. This lead the facilitator to question reasons behind the discrepancy. Upon reflection, a key factor that distinguished the more productive PWI group of Black faculty from its HBCU peers was their course loads. All members of the PWI Write on Site group either were research fellows with no teaching obligation or faculty with a reduced teaching load of one or two courses maximum. Many in the HBCU group taught four courses each semester and were expected to publish one article per year. This is compounded by the fact that many may not have been mentored in the publication process during their doctoral training (Author).

An increased demand for publishing, despite heavy teaching loads, has become commonplace for teaching or comprehensive universities working to become research institutions (Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). This observation reflects the importance of considering teaching load with university publication requirements. Such a consideration promises to not only increase research productivity, but heighten faculty job satisfaction as well by promoting work balance.

Conclusion

Implementing Write on Site enhanced the research and publication productivity of participating academics. The group further fostered work-life balance, leading to greater faculty productivity, retention, and promotion. This was most pronounced for participants from the PWI possessing modest teaching loads. However, similar results may be replicated regardless of institutional type should similar supports (such as reduced teaching loads and faculty writing initiatives) be made available.

Buy-in for Write on Site centers upon faculty understanding of the role of accountability in writing productivity, whether it be direct and formal via discussing scholarly progress with a colleague or indirect and informal via the simple act of writing amongst peers. Research related to the role of accountability in writing productivity may be offered by faculty developers during faculty orientations or writing related workshops. Future research on this topic may examine the experiences and long term productivity of Write on Site participants from various postsecondary settings.

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