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Online Writing Labs: Resources for Second Language Writers

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Online Writing Labs: Resources for Second Language Writers
This developer’s showcase presentation will discuss the following items. First, I will provide you with an overview of the Purdue Online Writing Lab and its mission regarding second language writing. I will then share with you how the efforts of myself and my fellow OWL content developers have led to a number of improvements in the support offered by the Purdue OWL to L2 writers. I will also share with you how this expansion is going to continue. Finally, I will share with you some of the research work being carried out by my colleague, Joshua M. Paiz and how this may impact L2 development efforts at the Purdue OWL.
The Purdue OWL has a stated mission to provide quality writing instructional material to a global user-base at absolutely no charge. This is something that is currently being reified in the newest drafts of the strategic plan of the Purdue Writing Lab/Online Writing Lab. And, while some form of L2 support has been a part of the OWL since the early 2000’s, it has come to the attention of Purdue OWL administration that must more must be done in order to support both the L2 writers at Purdue University that make use of the OWL as well as the L2 writers that make use of the Purdue OWL around the globe. That being said there are certain limits to the scope of the Purdue OWL’s mission.
The scope of the Purdue OWL’s L2 Writing Support

Purdue OWL support is currently linked to needs at Purdue University and at Lafayette Area partners.

The scope of the Purdue OWL’s mission is expanding.

However, this scope does not currently include basic English writing, L1 writing, the place of the L1 in L2 writing, or one-to-one web-based tutorials.

The scope of the L2 support mission at the Purdue OWL has previously been linked to the needs of L2 writers attending Purdue University system campuses, and are most closely tied to the needs of writers new to the North American Academic Context and to select global business English contexts (i.e., China and India). The original scope of the Purdue OWL’s L2 writing support was also previously closely linked to the needs of our community partners, namely the Lafayette Adult Resource Academy. This partnership meant that the Purdue OWL addressed some more basic English writing needs and also addressed GED writing for L2 writers.

This scope, however, is currently expanding to include the Purdue OWL’s global user-base. This has led to a number of changes, which I will discuss shortly, as well as current development efforts aimed at writers in the traditionally-defined EFL context. However, even with this expansion the OWL’s scope does not include basic English writing, writing in the L1 or the place the L1 in L2 writing. While additional attention is being given to Business Writing in World Englishes contexts, other issues related to multilingual writing are not currently seen as inside the scope of the Purdue OWL’s mission.
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As internet access has proliferated across the globe OWL’s have become more accessible to users once considered outside of their reach. They can make a positive impact by reaching connected students where they’re at. They can also lower educational costs by providing open-access educational resources.

However, maintaining a site like the Purdue OWL and keeping it relevant to a growing and an evolving set of end users is a different matter entirely. In the next section of this presentation, I will share with you some of the ways in which one OWL, the Purdue OWL has worked to remain useful to it’s international audience.
Welcome to the Purdue OWL

The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University houses writing resources and instructional material, and we provide these as a free service of the Writing Lab at Purdue. Students, members of the community, and users worldwide will find information to assist with many writing projects. Teachers and trainers may use this material for in-class and out-of-class instruction.

In addition, we invite users to submit brief, writing-related questions to our OWL Mail.
ESL Students

These OWL resources will help ESL students in second language writing. This section includes resources on writing across the curriculum, writing in the disciplines, and it contains links to OWL workshops and exercises useful for ESL students. This section also includes links to ESL resources on the Internet.

ESL-specific exercises can be found here.

US Higher Education: A Cultural Introduction
This handout is an introduction to some of the basics of working, networking, and living at US colleges and universities.

Tips for Writing in North American Colleges
This handout is an introduction to the basics of academic writing conventions for students who are new to American colleges and universities.

Plagiarism and ESL Writers
This resource provides a look at plagiarism and the unique situation faced by many ESL writers working and learning in North American Academic contexts. Additional information on plagiarism in general can be found on the Purdue OWL by visiting Avoiding Plagiarism. Exercises on plagiarism can be found on the Purdue OWL by visiting Safe Practices: An Exercise.

Writing for Global Business Audiences: An Introduction
This section functions as an introduction to our “Writing for Indian Business Audience,” “Writing for a North American Business Audience,” and “Writing for a Chinese Business Audience” sections.
US Higher Education: A "Local" Introduction

Summary:
The handout is an introduction to some of the basics of working, networking, and living at US colleges and universities. Some of these rules are found throughout various aspects of the American "culture." Beyond the walls of educational institutions: others are specific to educational contexts, and are meant to foster certain kinds of relationships between members of the academic community. These norms, in part, determine what is considered appropriate in the interactions the average student experiences during his or her studies, in big and small classrooms, in one-on-one meetings, in an e-mail, and even in instant messages and on blogs. Unlike other countries where students' academic lives may be separate from their social lives, US universities typically offer a learning environment that combines both the social and the academic sides of the students' lives by creating opportunities that combine both of these aspects.

This handout presents some basic concepts that may be unfamiliar to students who are starting their college or university studies in the United States. A few of the standards of US schools are identical to those found in higher education in other countries—but not all of them, particularly regarding interactions with professors and other instructors.
• Who developed the revisions and expansions
• L2 writers developing for L2 writers
• Self-example
• Best-practices for use of ESL resources
I would like to close by way of offering some words from my colleague Joshua M. Paiz regarding future directions of the Purdue OWL in regards to second language writing. He could not be here today due to a conflicting conference appointment in Ohio. He writes:

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While OWLs are used around the globe, the work relating to OWLs in the EFL, or even in the ESL context, has not kept pace with work done in related field such as Computer Assisted Language Learning and Online Writing Instruction. This is problematic, as my travels presenting my OWL based research has generated a great deal of interest from writing center specialists in China, Japan, and Poland. These are contexts with rapidly growing interests in writing centers and in their online counterparts. However, most OWL-related work done, particularly in the Asian contexts, has been carried out by what Tan identifies as transplants—individuals that have worked and been trained in the west. Little work has been done examining what practitioners in the EFL context need or want from OWLs, on how they use OWLs, or in how students receive them. This is very problematic as it limits our collective knowledge and can lead to a great deal of reinventing the wheel when writing center specialists attempt to bring new OWLs online in the EFL context. To help address this gap and to drive our own content development efforts, The Purdue OWL is carrying out a series of research projects, the first of which will share briefly with you today.
From August 2012-May 2013, the Purdue OWL carried out research examining attitudes, perceptions, and uses of OWLs and the Purdue OWLs in the traditionally-defined EFL context. During the survey and follow-up interview period over 135 survey responses were collected and seven interviews were conducted. Our major findings were that OWLs were largely used for teacher self-reference. They were not used very often in class, nor were students often referred to them. Secondly, we found that the survey respondents, EFL practitioners from all over the globe, were largely neutral or ambivalent regarding the appropriateness of Purdue OWL resources to meet the needs of their students. However, their response do show a wide variety of ways that OWLs can better meet their needs through additional content development. These findings have helped to drive Purdue OWL expansion in a number of ways.
In the spring of 2014, the Purdue OWL partnered with The Second Language Studies program at Purdue University. This partnership has led to an influx of content developers that are themselves L2 writers and that have a great deal of experience teaching L2 writers. In part based on feedback from our users and from the Purdue community, we have begun projects in the following area (READ LIST). These projects will be completed during summer of 2014 and they will go live during the fall of the same year.

- New MLA/APA resource written by and for second language writers
- New MLA/APA video lectures written by and for L2 writers
- TOEFL/IELTS writing instructional resources
- New resources regarding narrative writing, interviewing, and argumentative writing
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