

# Chapter 15. PARS for the Course: Using PARS to Teach PARS in an Online Graduate Seminar

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**Abstract:** This chapter contributes to scholarship on preparing graduate teaching assistants through an online graduate seminar to be online writing instructors. In this chapter I detail the use of PARS as both course content and the approach to designing and delivering the course. I briefly describe the institutional context, student demographics, and student attitudes toward online teaching and learning before discussing the use of PARS to design and deliver an online graduate seminar as a model for English graduate students in a traditional English department. I also discuss students' disparate responses to the centrality of PARS as content, design, and delivery, and their uptake of PARS in their remote crisis teaching. I conclude with a missed opportunity for user testing caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and applications of PARS to remote crisis teaching, which is quite different from OWI, even though the two overlap to some degree.

**Keywords:** graduate students; online pedagogy; teacher preparation; memes

As more and more students access postsecondary education over distance, online writing courses (OWCs), especially first-year writing (FYW) courses, can be barriers or gateways to student learning and success depending on how they are designed and delivered. For over a decade, this reality has prompted more graduate courses in online writing instruction (OWI) to prepare graduate teaching assistants to design and deliver OWCs that act as gateways. Borgman and McArdle (2019) write that PARS “provid[es] a balanced and supported approach that encompasses the theory and practice from decades of previous research [that] will help to develop a new generation of online writing instructors” (p. 5). In this chapter, I discuss my use of PARS in an online graduate seminar as both the course’s featured content and the primary approach used to design and deliver it. I begin by briefly describing the institutional context, student demographics, and student attitudes toward online teaching and learning. I then discuss using PARS to design and deliver this asynchronous course and students’ disparate responses to the centrality of PARS as content, design, and delivery. I conclude with a missed opportunity for user testing caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and applications of PARS to remote crisis teaching, which is quite different from OWI, as well as a look to a possible future of OWI informed by PARS.

While I'm no golf pro (to take up Borgman and McArdle's metaphor for OWI), as this graduate-level course might suggest, I expect my performance to be PARS for the course every time I teach writing online! Helping graduate student instructors develop their capacity to do the same was my primary goal for the graduate seminar. Specifically, I wanted to model each element of PARS so that students could draw on the seminar as they designed their own online English courses, most of which were first-year writing courses, and made plans to guide their delivery of those courses. I also wanted to help students avoid many of the mistakes I made as a novice online writing instructor when I, like Borgman and McArdle, began teaching writing online more than a decade ago. In their final papers, students reported using PARS as they quickly put together online materials for remote crisis teaching as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, though they recognized that remote crisis teaching and OWI differ considerably. Despite this disruption, almost all of the students found PARS approachable and readily applicable to designing user-friendly OWCs that support student learning and success. PARS also enabled some students to navigate the move to remote crisis teaching more successfully than they otherwise would have. Part of that new generation of PARS-trained online writing instructors, they learned to teach PARS for the course and expressed confidence in that approach in their final papers. While the long-term effects of the pandemic on higher education are not yet clear, it is abundantly clear that well prepared online writing instructors are more in demand than ever, and that's an undeniably good thing in a precarious higher education job market.

## Institutional Context and Student Demographics for Teaching English Online

The institutional context for this sixteen-week graduate course, called Teaching English Online, was an R3 university in the Mountain West that offers an M.A. program, a TESOL certificate, and the state's only Ph.D. program in English Studies. Both programs attract domestic students from the region and the Ph.D. program also attracts international students who reside in-state. The seminar included students from Nigeria, Wales, and Zimbabwe. Also, secondary school teachers often pursue the M.A. to become credentialed to teach dual enrollment sections of FYW; three secondary school teachers were enrolled in the course. The program advertises itself as emphasizing pedagogy to prepare and place teacher-scholars in positions at two-year and small four-year colleges, which it did at a fairly high rate prior to the pandemic. With pedagogy an emphasis throughout the Ph.D., the practical value of a course in online pedagogy appealed to many students and the course filled quickly.

Pedagogical approaches among graduate faculty members ranged widely on a spectrum of teacher-centered and lecture-based to student-centered and activity-based. Half of tenure-track (TT) and all non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty specialized in literary studies. Other TT faculty specialized in linguistics, cre-

ative writing, and rhetoric and composition/professional and technical writing with two faculty in each area and both rhet/comp faculty pre-tenure at the time the course was taught—yet another example of English departments subordinating rhetoric, composition, and writing studies to literary studies (Crowley, 1998; Miller, 1979). Echoing faculty, graduate students pursued literary studies at a very high rate. While many graduate students pursued writing pedagogy with equal interest and passion, some strongly preferred teaching literature to teaching writing. That student preference affected course design in that I offered students the opportunity to develop an online course in literary studies. But, like English graduate students everywhere, everyone was keenly aware that they would teach writing at least some of the time in an academic teaching job, so everyone chose to make an online writing course or secondary school equivalent.

Students' teaching assignments during the semester also ranged widely and affected how they participated in the graduate seminar. Of a total fourteen students, eight were teaching face-to-face (F2F) FYW and communication at the university; two were teaching middle school and high school English language arts; and five Ph.D. students had supervised teaching internships in non-writing English courses above the first-year, sometimes in addition to their FYW teaching assignment. (The numbers do not total fourteen because some students fit in two categories, such as those teaching FYW and working on a supervised teaching internship—four students). Two students did not have a teaching assignment due to fellowship or by choice; one of these students expected to return to teaching high school. Only one student was teaching online and did so as part of a supervised internship rather than as the instructor of record. While I took students' co-curricular teaching into account early on, it became *very* important when the COVID-19 pandemic required all teachers to move to remote crisis teaching, a move I discuss later. Before that, though, students spent a great deal of time thinking and writing about OWI and other online English teaching through the lenses of their co-curricular teaching, a practice I modeled by referring often in videos and discussion board responses to my own co-curricular teaching of an online technical writing course.

## PARS for the Course: Assessing and Responding to Students' Prior Experiences

The institutional context, student demographics, and student preferences heavily influenced my responsive course design. Having taught most of the students before in a F2F writing pedagogy seminar, I knew that their levels of experience with and attitudes toward online pedagogy and digital technologies varied considerably. I assessed this variation with a pre-semester survey circulated among teachers of technical writing at Purdue University that I modified for this course (with some language retained verbatim). The survey was used before class began and in the first week of class.

### Experience and Skills Inventory

1. What is your name?
2. Have you taken a fully online course before? (Yes/No)
3. Have you taught online before? (Yes/No)
4. How many semesters or years have you been teaching? (Short answer)
5. What course(s) have you taught and where did you teach them? (Short answer)
6. On a scale of 1–5, how comfortable are you with learning new digital technologies? (1=Not at all | 5= Highly: I seek out new digital technologies for work or play.)
7. Where do you expect to teach online? ([This university] or another college/university that uses Moodle | A college/university that uses something else (Blackboard, Canvas, D2L, etc. | A high school | I don't know/I'm not sure, but I do expect/hope to teach online in the next few years | I don't expect to teach online in the next few years | Other:)
8. What do you want to learn in this course? (Long answer)
9. Technology Skills. (Multiple choice grid: see Figure 15.1)
10. Any other technologies that you have experience with that might be valuable?<sup>1</sup> (Long answer)
11. What is a technology, program, or skill you would like to learn more about this semester? (Long answer)
12. Is there anything else that your instructor should know about you? (e.g., special skills, you're looking for a job, applying to a Ph.D. program, working full time, disability status, parent or caregiver, etc.) (Long answer)

Though more than three-quarters of students had taken an online class, over 90% had not taught one. Six students expected to teach online in the near future; another six hoped to do so but weren't sure they would; and two did not expect to teach online in the near future. Of course, no one knew at the time that everyone with a teaching assignment would be forced to teach with digital technologies halfway through the semester in response to quarantine, which I address later.

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1. Students were not required to answer questions 10 or 12.

# Technology Skills \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	Expert	Proficient	Novice	I don't know what this is	This scares me, please don't make me try it
Moodle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Google Suite (Docs, Drive, Forms, Sheets, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Powerpoint or other presentation software (Google Slides, Keynote, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Screen Recorders (Camtasia, Screencast-O-Matic, QuickTime)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Survey Software (Google Forms, Qualtrics, SurveyMonkey, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team/Project Management Software (Slack, Trello, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Video Conferencing (Zoom, Google Hangouts, Skype, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*Figure 15.1. This multiple-choice grid yielded especially helpful results that affected the design of the midterm technology review assignment.*

Results from the multiple-choice Technology Skills grid (see Figure 15.1) were especially revealing with regard to screen recording and video conferencing, two technologies commonly used in online teaching; these results shaped the midterm assignment, a technology review. While nine students had some degree of familiarity with screen recording software (eight novice, one proficient), three indicated not knowing what it was and two indicated fear and unwillingness to try it. Video conferencing fared better with six indicating proficiency, five at the novice level, two not knowing what it was, and one afraid of it. In response, I modified the midterm assignment to require students to use screen recording software to present their review of an educational technology or LMS tool they

had not used before, effectively requiring them to learn two new technologies. Always mindful of modeling, especially when some students indicated fear of screen recording, I made a video example showing them my review of a new-to-me LMS tool, which is similar to “How To” genre of short videos Casey made for faculty members as an online WPA (Borgman & McArdle, 2019, pp. 47-48). Some students included gaining proficiency with screen recording as a course goal during the first week of class because they realized (or already knew) that, as Borgman and McArdle discuss at length, videos in which students can see their teacher personalize an online class.

Three distinct groups—novice, accomplished novice, and expert—emerged from survey results. Three self-identified techies filled out the expert end of the spectrum and three self-identified luddites filled out the novice end with the other eight in the middle as accomplished novices with proficiencies related to online instruction. At the extreme ends were one student with minimal computer literacy and one student with a computer science degree. I used these results to calibrate the course to make it accessible (in Borgman and McArdle’s [2019] sense of being useful and removing barriers to learning) to students whose pedagogy was oriented toward lecture, who had little experience with digital technologies, and who were skeptical about the efficacy of online teaching and learning. While this was no small feat, such responsiveness is part of teaching PARS for the course.

## PARS for the Course: Design and Delivery

Inspired by learning outcomes for a similar course at Old Dominion University, learning outcomes for Teaching English Online emphasized “teaching students how to read and work with the technologies’ affordances” (Grover et al., 2017, p. 246). The course’s main readings and activities asked students to learn and apply principles of OWI and online literacy instruction (OLI), and learn and apply the PARS approach as they developed their own OWI materials. I divided the course into two halves with the first four learning outcomes tied to the first eight weeks of class and the remaining outcomes to the second eight weeks. The learning outcomes can be found below.

### Learning Outcomes for Teaching English Online

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Demonstrate awareness of and be conversant in principles of and approaches to online literacy/writing instruction,
- Situate current practices in online literacy/writing instruction within the historical, political, economic, and social contexts of distance education,

- Apply principles of learning to an existing course syllabus,
- Apply the PARS approach to online course design,
- Explore and evaluate learning technologies based on their user friendliness and appropriateness for your students,
- Create a working online course shell or site based on principles and practices of online literacy/writing instruction,
- Evaluate a peer's online course shell or site as part of usability testing, and
- Evaluate and synthesize principles and approaches to online literacy/writing instruction.

The first eight weeks covered students' backgrounds and experiences with online teaching and learning; the principles of OWI/OLI from the CCCC OWI Committee and The Global Society of Online Literacy Educators, respectively, as well as book chapters and articles by OWI scholars; principles of teaching derived from learning science research in *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching* (Ambrose et al., 2010); the history and theory of distance education from *Teaching and Learning at a Distance: Foundations of Distance Education* (Simonson et al., 2015); and, for four weeks, PARS (Borgman & McArdle, 2019). As I discuss below, spending four weeks on PARS was a strategic decision I made in response to students' prior experiences and experiences in the first two weeks of the course. During this time, students revised an existing syllabus using the principles of teaching from Ambrose et al. (2010) and made plans to use the affordances of their LMS to make their course personal, accessible, responsive, and strategic (PARS).

The second half of the course focused on application and practice. It was to begin with the technology review before moving to structured time to build course shells, usability testing of course shells, revision based on feedback, and a final paper on course design choices and plans for delivery vis-à-vis students' most valued principles of online pedagogy for English courses. I discuss later how the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted the course and forced most students to become crisis teachers using online modalities but not, as they realized, online writing or literature teachers. In the rest of this section I show how I used each element of PARS in the course. Memes and cartoons were central to my personalization of the course and illustration of some concepts, and I discuss them across each element.

## Personal

In addition to using personalized videos and an instructor profile that Borgman and McArdle (2019) discuss, I used memes and cartoons to make my online



course personal. In a genre native to the internet, memes convey the same humor and playfulness I use to make myself seem human in F2F settings. Most memes I use feature animals that capture students' emotional states at different points in the term (responsively and strategically!). For example, I use a pair of memes strategically at the end of the term in every online course I teach: one of a chipmunk stretching its whole body across a rock and reaching forward with the words "Must . . . make it . . . to end of semester" and, below the link to submit the final assignment, a meme of a squirrel reaching for the sky in a power pose with the words "End of the semester!!" Humorous, playful, emotionally resonant memes make me approachable by showing I understand how students feel during especially stressful weeks. These memes express that I'm a human, too, something Borgman and McArdle (2019) emphasize is important to illustrate to students.

Memes can also be used to illustrate concepts and situations important to the course. One funny meme per week or two that visually conveys a concept is, for me, par for the online course. I know I'm playing the game at a high level when memes serve both purposes. I framed the course's Start Here area with a 1993 *New Yorker* cartoon of two dogs in which "On the internet, nobody knows you're a dog" (not shown) and a 2010 meme update using a cat that addresses anonymity and ethos and provides a glimpse of playful internet culture (see Figure 15.2). Another example of using visuals to illustrate concepts appears in the next section on accessible OWI. My playful humor set a tone and a few students played along by sharing their own fun visuals and, later, including visuals on the course sites they built.

While most of these memes came from Google Image searches, I occasionally made them when existing memes did not meet my needs. I used Meme-Generator.com to make two memes that illustrate the need for balance in responsive online writing instruction, which was a concern shared by everyone in the class that I discuss using the memes in the Responsive section of this chapter (see Figure 15.4).

As always, it's important to consider how cultural differences may affect students' online learning experiences. Animal memes do not resonate across some cultures the way they do in the US. For example, treating companion animals like humans is not common in many African countries and likely did not register as funny or relatable to the same degree for the two students from Africa (as one informed me in a different class). This cultural difference becomes a "friction point" that can impede student comprehension or another aspect of learning (Rice & St.Amant, 2018). This friction point in conveying information effectively across cultures points to the importance of carefully considering international audiences (Rice & St.Amant, 2018) and ensuring that one's teaching practices are culturally sensitive (Parrish & Linder-VanBerschoot, 2010) and inclusive.



# START HERE!



[Video Introduction to the Course](#)



[Course Syllabus](#)



[How This Course Works](#)



[Video Discussion of Assignments](#)



[Experiences and Skills Inventory](#)



[Lolcat](#) online course meme written in lolspeak, circa 2010s.

*Figure 15.2. The “start here” section is made personal by a meme. Meme created with Cheezburger.com. Used with the permission of Laura Gibbs.*

## Accessible

Accessibility was the least familiar concept and practice for students and the topic most likely to overwhelm them with technological minutiae. Although Borgman and McArdle (2019) present a user-friendly version of accessibility, the concept challenged many students to think in an unfamiliar way. I responded to this conceptual newness by including a cartoon about user experience (see Figure 15.3). One of only a few visuals depicting humans, the cartoon shows two white adults standing over a white baby’s crib and admiring a toy mobile in one panel while the other shows the baby’s view of toy animal butts. The meme jokingly reminds designers (teachers) that they often stop when their needs are met and thus fail to meet the needs of their users (students). Having a visual encapsulate a core idea about accessibility and user experience was tremendously helpful to some students, according to their discussions and reflections from the week.

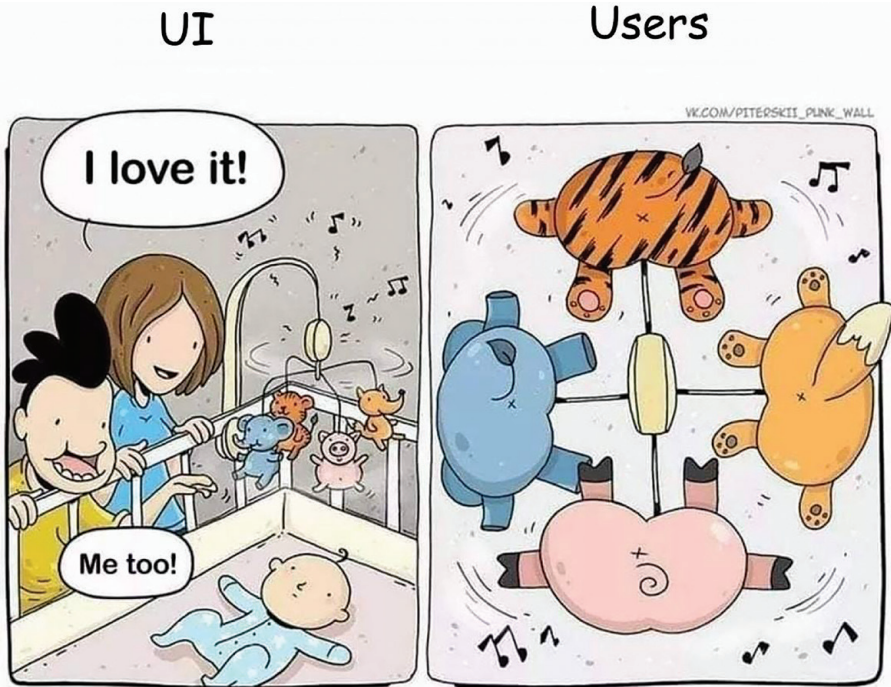


Figure 15.3. A cartoon humorously illustrates user experience.

Though the visual helped students grasp the new concept, some students in the class tended to think in a teacher-centered manner that was often accompanied by ableist assumptions and ignorance about ableism. These teacher-centered students also tended to let their own mastery of writing in certain rhetorical situations (academic ones circumscribed by standardized American English for academic purposes) lead them to forget the uncomfortable feeling of conscious incompetence—knowing that one doesn’t know enough in a specific domain to be competent—experienced by novices, such as first-year writing students (Ambrose et al., 2010). Those entrenched in habituated practice struggled to recall academic writing as a challenge (Anson, 2015) and also tended to be entrenched in unacknowledged ableist assumptions. Although these students also found the user experience cartoon helpful, the word “user” became a barrier to learning for them.

In a discussion of different video captioning options, some students expressed antipathy for the word “user,” motivated by their humanistic-inspired rejection of any terms that suggested business or consumption. Unfortunately, a few students were bothered enough by the “user” in “user experience” that they rejected the idea of centering user experience. One student also suggested that first-year undergraduates don’t know what kind of user experience they need; the student’s peers argued against this perspective and advanced student-centered ideas root-

ed in user experience, UDL, and Disability Studies. The first student softened their stance as a result. I observed more peer teaching and learning on the topic of accessibility than I did on other topics, which suggests restructuring learning activities to include more peer teaching on accessibility.

Since Borgman and McArdle (2019) approach accessibility from a user experience perspective, I also included Oswal (2015) to introduce students to a Disability Studies perspective. I included links to the Universal Design for Learning Guidelines (v.2.2) and the University of Washington's Course Accessibility Checklist as well. Many students found Oswal's necessarily detailed, complex discussion of assistive devices and technologies overwhelming, and some responded that way to the UDL Guidelines, too. In contrast, local information about the university's or school district's accessible technology services and resources was met with relief. Learning about these services and resources, such as options for adding closed captions to videos, equipped students with resources and eased their anxiety about ensuring their online course would be accessible to all learners.

## Responsive

One of the most salient lessons students learned came during the first week from Hewett (2014) and was reinforced throughout the semester by other readings and the students' experiences as online students in my class and another online graduate course: OWI is more time-intensive than F2F instruction. Students worried, and rightly so, about balancing this increased time commitment with other demands on their time. Each was a dedicated teacher committed to their students and knew that being responsive could become a trap unless they maintained boundaries and guarded their time. Their response to being responsive manifested very early as concern about time management and led me to make two animal memes for that week to illustrate the conundrum of responsive online teaching (see Figure 15.4). One meme features a black cat typing on a laptop with the words "Responsive online instructor is responsive" while the other features a French bulldog lying tiredly on a deck and warns of burnout: "Responsive online instructor is too responsive." These memes captured students' concerns about time management apropos of responsive online teaching. I also added a short reading on time management and procrastination, two topics that tended to come up together, and examples of time management plans made by other academics and me.

In addition to struggling with time management overall, students also worried about how to balance a writing teacher's obligation to give helpful feedback with a newer teacher's tendency to over-comment and be too available. In other words, they wanted to know how much feedback was enough. Students debated the use of boilerplate comments to recurring issues in their students' writing and developed a plan for responsive—but not *too* responsive—course delivery. Their plans were either weekly schedules that would recur each week or semester schedules that accounted for busier-than-usual weeks or both. For some, making these

responsive plans entailed changing their expectations for themselves as writing teachers in order to guard their time as graduate students and then negotiating their sense that they weren't doing enough for their students. The intellectual and emotional labor of being a responsive online teacher weighed on students as they dealt with the tension between their ideals and the realities of OWI.

### Week 6 (Feb. 17-23): PARS - Responsive



#### Readings and Resources

 [Week 6 video guide](#)

#### Responsive

 [Jessie Borgman and Casey McArdle, 2019, "Chapter 3: Responsive," PARS, 51-69.](#)

#### Time Management

 [Charlotte Lieberman, 2019, "Why You Procrastinate \(It Has Nothing to Do With Self-Control\)," The Ne](#)

 [Time Management Plans/Maps](#)



*Figure 15.4. Two memes I made to illustrate the balancing act of responsive online teaching.*

#### Strategic

Just as being responsive made intuitive sense to students because they were already responsive teachers, being strategic also made sense and sparked another good discussion. I shared my strategic decision to spend four weeks on PARS, one week on each element, in order to slow the pace of the reading, focus on each element of the approach in depth, increase the number of activities, and allow ample time for reflection. Students appreciated the slower pace but many found themselves in the habit of putting off work for the course until the weekend when it was due—the very habit some of them worried their own students would develop in an online environment.

Since strategic course design must include all students to be sufficiently strategic, teachers must learn about students' demographics, motivations, distractions, and skills, which often vary considerably (Borgman & McArdle, 2019). Like Jessie's students at the community college (Borgman & McArdle, 2019), first-year writing students for whom the graduate students were designing OWCs included adult learners, first-generation college students, military-affiliated students, minoritized BIPOC students, international students, L2/ELL students, refugee students, and students from underfunded rural school districts. These students often have full- or part-time jobs, children, and other caregiving responsibilities, and many are active in their faith communities and reserve weekends for family time. Some students live on a nearby Indian reservation and in other rural areas where they may have to use their smartphones and data plans to access their courses due to a lack of broadband internet infrastructure. In short, they tend to be busy, constrained by limited access to the internet, and in possession of a mix of skill levels, confidence, and anxiety about learning to write in an online environment. Strategically minded instructors work with student feedback that they solicit early and often (Borgman & Dockter, 2018) as part of strategic course design, an approach that creates a positive user experience for students (Borgman & McArdle, 2019).

I modeled one way to solicit student feedback early by sharing an About Me survey that I use in several classes (see below). I did not include the About Me survey in Teaching English Online because most had taken the survey in another course with me and, with other opportunities to share similar information, the survey would have felt redundant. As I noted previously, I changed the midterm technology review after students' answers to the Experience and Skills Inventory. The Technology Skills grid (see Figure 15.1) revealed inexperience with screen recording as well as a desire to learn this technology. Students' early feedback allowed me to make this significant change to a major assignment early in the semester and clearly in response to their feedback.<sup>2</sup>

### **About Me for English 101**

Please answer these questions about yourself. Your answers will be kept private and will be used only to support your success in the course.

1. Your name
2. Your pronouns
  - He/him/his
  - She/her/hers
  - They/them/theirs
  - Other:

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2. The About Me survey is administered during the first week of class.

3. Your age

- 16–24
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55–64
- 65+

4. How many credit hours are you taking this semester?

- 3–8 hours
- 9–14 hours
- 15–17 hours
- 18 hours or more

5. Do you have a job?

- Yes, I work part time (20 hours or less)
- Yes, I work full time (40 hours)
- Yes, I work beyond full time (40 hours or more)
- No, I am not employed right now but I am looking for a part-time job this semester
- No, I am not employed right now but I am looking for a full-time job this semester
- No, I am not employed right now and I am NOT looking for a job this semester

6. If you have a job, are you allowed to study or do homework at your job?

- Yes
- No
- I don't have a job right now

7. Are you a primary caregiver?

- Yes, I am a primary caregiver for a child or children, spouse or partner, parent(s), sibling(s), friend(s), grandparent(s), or someone else in my life
- No, I am not a primary caregiver

8. Which option best describes your access to computer and internet technologies?

- I am using a smartphone as my computer AND for internet access. I have reliable internet access.

- I am using a smartphone as my computer AND for internet access. I do NOT have reliable internet access.
- I am using a personal computer (laptop, tablet, desktop) AND I have reliable internet access at home.
- I have a personal computer BUT my internet access is not reliable at home and I have to go somewhere else for internet access (sometimes or always).
- I am using a library or school computer that I cannot take home AND internet access at a library or school.

9. On a scale of 1–5, how confident are you about reading for college courses? (1= not confident at all | 5 = very confident)

10. On a scale of 1–5, how confident are you about writing for college courses? (1= not confident at all | 5 = very confident)

Thanks for your time. If you have concerns about how your obligations outside of class might affect your ability to succeed in the class, let Dr. Wilkes (email@school.edu) know as soon as you can so she can support you.

The week that students began work on their technology reviews, they were also preparing to host or speak at the annual graduate student conference on campus, an event I neglected to include in my strategy for this course. I polled students during that week about moving the technology review to the next week, to which they agreed with relief, and changed the due date. That Friday, some of us saw each other in person for the first and last times that semester as word of a state quarantine order reached us during the keynote address. At that point, our focus on OWI shifted to a focus on remote teaching during a crisis as students suddenly had a week off from the graduate course, a week they spent preparing to teach remotely.

## PARS for the Pandemic

When all instruction became remote in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the seminar became at once more “real” in that students had to use digital technologies to teach remotely and stranger in that they were not able to apply much of what they had just learned in the deliberate, time-intensive way they had learned to apply it. They were engaged in remote crisis teaching, not OWI. Most recognized that strange duality: while they were using digital technologies to deliver instruction, they had not planned their courses as OWCs and did not have enough time to make the switch. One student felt that the seminar was a waste of time because they were not able to apply what they had learned to their teaching; they concluded that online teaching was a matter of trial and error rather than the strategic application of OWI/OLI principles and approaches like PARS. I in-



vited this student to consider in their final paper how they might be engaged in remote crisis teaching rather than OWI, but the student did not do so. However, some students made the transition easily thanks to the PARS approach, and one student who was teaching secondary school shared PARS with her colleagues to their great appreciation. A majority of students expressed gratitude for the seminar and a sense of serendipitous timing. In particular, all students appreciated Barrett-Fox's (2020) plea for instructors to consider how students' radically altered living situations might affect their ability to do academic work and adjust expectations accordingly.

With students suddenly teaching remotely, I scrapped the plan to have them build in an LMS the course they had been designing. Instead, I counted the digitally mediated teaching they did for the rest of the semester in lieu of that course. It's easy to see how one student felt like nothing they learned was applicable: I counted remote crisis teaching as OWI even though the two differ considerably. However, most students understood this difference, and everyone who was teaching appreciated this responsive, strategic adjustment to the course's final assignment. The two students not teaching as well as one student preparing a course shell for the summer completed a pared-down version of the original assignment, including basic user testing and revision (though I dropped the readings meant to guide this work).

While the first seven weeks of this course were on par, the rest were chaotic and tremendously challenging. But a majority of students felt somewhat prepared to take on the challenge of digitally mediated teaching, recognizing that they would have been even less prepared without the course. A few students even excelled as remote teachers! With OWI all the more salient in a pandemic mitigated by physically distancing, the PARS course may not have been as on par as anyone expected, but it was ultimately a valuable learning experience that all students will draw upon in their future online teaching. Even students initially resistant to the notion that "we're all online writing instructors" (Borgman & McArdle, 2019, p. 3) found a way into online teaching, with the golf metaphor serving as the door for some of them. Without the PARS approach, I doubt the course would have been as successful as it was in preparing students to teach writing online.

## Final Thoughts and Application

As I write this conclusion, most of the students from Teaching English Online are preparing to teach synchronous, asynchronous, or hyflex FYW OWCs in fall 2020. Having devoted time and attention to learning the PARS approach and applying it to their course design, they are equipped to teach PARS for the course during a fall semester defined by uncertainty. As personal online writing instructors, their instructor presence will say "I'm a human!" to students who want human connections with their teachers. Their OWCs will be more accessible to all students, and those who internalized Borgman and McArdle's (2019) expansive version of accessibility will be better prepared to work with students during a semester likely to contain

personal traumas related to the pandemic. Responding to their students within a set of established expectations will help them maintain the human connections they created by being personal. Being strategic in their course design will be a significant challenge in light of uncertainty, but soliciting feedback early and often will help them craft strategic responses to situations as they arise.

While it is not possible to tell how the pandemic will transform higher education, 2020 is poised to be another watershed moment for online education. A generation of online writing instructors trained in the PARS approach could positively affect retention and persistence rates in OWCs by “produc[ing] experiences that exceed the learning potential of face-to-face interaction!” (Hart-Davidson, 2019, p. 96). And these instructors will likely to be more competitive, especially as they amass experience, if they seek teaching jobs in a precarious academic job market. PARS for the course could become PARS for the career!

For busy educators, this list closes the chapter by summarizing key observations and ideas for application.

- The PARS approach worked well as both course content and the basis of course design and delivery in a seminar for graduate students at M.A. and Ph.D. levels who had a range of experience with and attitudes toward OWI.
- This broad applicability suggests that PARS would work well as featured content in graduate courses aimed at many graduate student populations, from secondary school educators pursuing an M.A. part-time to Ph.D. students preparing for an academic career.
- Graduate students’ previous experiences as undergraduates in online courses across the curriculum and co-curricular teaching played important roles in how they perceived the PARS approach. Teachers using this chapter to prepare a graduate course or professional development series should allow ample opportunities for participants to reflect on past experiences and co-curricular teaching.
- Peer teaching and learning are especially valuable with concepts like accessibility that may not be familiar to participants.
- The notions of being responsive and strategic in teaching made intuitive sense to everyone who had teaching experience, including those teaching for the first time.

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