Special Issue – The Purdue OWL 20th Anniversary Retrospective
Looking back on twenty years of global online writing assistance

While we are pleased to be celebrating our 20th anniversary, we do so with a heavy heart.
On January 11, 2014, Dr. Linda Bergmann passed away. We dedicate this special issue to her memory.

Welcome from the OWL Coordinator

In the Spring of 1994, the web-version of the Purdue OWL came online. What was once a collection of paper and Gopher-based instructional handouts for the Purdue Writing Lab became an open-access resource for anyone with a web browser. The story of the OWL is multi-vocal. While many of our readers are familiar with the OWL and some members of its leadership team, the story of the OWL has not been presented in this manner before.

To achieve this story, the OWL staff have contacted former members of the OWL Leadership team from the past twenty years. We have asked them to tell their stories of the OWL. When we solicited these stories, we gave very skeletal instructions, asking only for the contributors to reminisce on their time at the OWL and the impacts that it had on their professional lives. We believe that this has allowed an organic story to coalesce.

We would like to thank each of the contributors for their time in sharing their stories. And, we would like to welcome you to our retrospective issue. We hope that you enjoy.

Joshua M. Paiz
OWL Coordinator

Welcome from the Associate Director

Writing the opening for this special issue of the Alumni Annotations to celebrate the OWL's 20th Anniversary has been unexpectedly difficult and sad: the passing of Dr. Linda Bergmann, Writing Lab Director, weighs heavily on our minds—for all of us who are OWL's current and previous staff, members of the writing center community, and supporters of the OWL.

Since Linda joined the Writing Lab in 2001, she shepherded the OWL into a preeminent writing resource. She would often tell the story about the first time she ever accessed the WWW; the OWL was the first site she ever saw. The OWL's user-centeredness and accessibility were always a priority for Linda, evident in her support of the OWL's usability research and development of specific resources for specific users. Linda was always concerned about keeping the OWL freely available and accessible, especially for the users who had no other resources or learning materials. In her work as a graduate faculty advisor, Linda encouraged students to conduct more OWL research and community outreach.

Tammy Conard-Salvo, Associate Director, Purdue Writing Lab

CWEST was one project that generated GED prep and job search materials in partnership with the Lafaytte Adult Resource Academy, and other behind-the-scenes work led to cross-programmatic collaboration that continued to strengthen the OWL. Linda's work with a Gates Foundation Grant allowed her to explore ways of bringing a version of the OWL to high school students, particularly those who were at-risk.

We dedicate this issue to Linda Bergmann. We celebrate a website that had humble beginnings, one that has persisted despite changes to technology and writing instruction, and we celebrate one of the OWL's leaders who helped ensured its success.

Because of Linda Bergmann, founding director Mickey Harris, current and past OWL staff and content developers, and OWL's partners, the OWL has reached millions of students, instructors, parents, and other users since the web version first went online in 1994. It grew from a gopher site distributing handouts to a web-based repository addressing general and discipline-specific writing concerns. This special issue of Alumni Annotations features the perspectives of the OWL's current and former coordinators and webmasters: the OWL as Burkean parlor, the OWL and usability, OWL as a site of research, and the OWL's development over time. The future remains unseen, yet our focus on open-access, usability, and research remains constant.

20 OWL
Purdue University

Dr. Linda Bergmann & The OWL

Dr. Linda Bergmann,
Director of the Purdue
Writing Lab
(2001-2014)

On January 11, 2014, the Writing Lab lost a valued leader, mentor, and friend. While her contribution to this piece remains unfinished, we would like to share with you Linda's comments for our Fall Open House Event.

"Wherever I travel, when I tell people that I come from Purdue, they say something like "Oh, the OWL!" It's gratifying to know that so many people, from different walks of life use the OWL. The OWL extends Purdue's Land Grant tradition across the country and around the world. I hope—and expect—that it will still be flying for another 20 years."

An OWL Logo from 1995, pointing the way to writing assistance

OWL Legacy Logos

Over the course of its twenty year history, the Purdue OWL has had a number of logos that have represented it across various media. Throughout this special issue of *Alumni Annotations*, you will find a number of our legacy logos from across the years. Our current logo is presented on the left. The legacy logos were rediscovered during a special 20th anniversary content development project, the Purdue OWL Archives Digitization Project.

The Archives Digitization Project was commissioned during the summer of 2013 and assigned to Content Developer Nicholas Marino. The goal of this project was to organize and to digitize the myriad documents saved by the Purdue OWL staff. While the project has helped to clear up some much needed space at the OWL, its true success has been in centralizing the Purdue OWL's archived documents in a more accessible and searchable form.

OWL Art

Dancing OWLs
by
Joanna Crawshaw

Did you know that Purdue OWL users have contributed many pieces of art to the OWL? Over the years we've received a number of unsolicited owl-themed pieces of art work. These gems of gratitude come to the OWL via snail mail and email from users of all ages and from all corners of the globe. They are all unique and skillfully crafted pieces which have delighted Purdue OWL staff.

If you'd like to leaf through the art work, visit https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/742/1/.

And, if you'd like to contribute your own OWL art, please follow the directions at the link above. Thank you, most kindly, to our users for making the OWL a more vibrant place!

What We Did While We Waited: 1995-1997

Stuart Blythe
OWL Coordinator, 1995-1997

The years 1995-1997 were a time of rapid development and conceptual dilemmas for Purdue's Online Writing Lab (OWL). The rapid development occurred because the growth of the OWL mirrored that of the Internet. When Dave Taylor and I began to talk about the OWL in 1995, I knew what a Gopher and a MOO were, and I knew that Dave had set up e-mail and Gopher servers to distribute the numerous handouts that had been written and revised over the years by instructors in the Writing Lab.

With the Mosaic browser released in 1993 and the appearance of the first full version of Netscape just over a year later in December 1994, use of the Web most likely doubled each year between 1995-1997 (Coffman & Odlyzko, 1998, p. 3). We realized that Gopher technology would soon fade away, so we let the Gopher server languish and focused instead on consulting via e-mail and converting handouts formatted in ASCII to ones formatted in HTML. (I also spent a considerable amount of time meeting with classes and groups on campus, explaining what the Web was and showing them how to access it.) As use of the OWL exploded, upper administration began to take notice. Some were especially impressed by who was using the OWL. A few administrators with an eye on Purdue's reputation were thrilled that users were coming from places such as NASA and Harvard. Although this growth impressed many, I found myself wondering whether the OWL grew for reasons that writing center practitioners would support. This is when the conceptual dilemma occurred.

Despite the range of logistical questions I faced, the conceptual questions became even more pressing. To appreciate the conceptual dilemmas that the growth of the OWL presented, consider Andrea Lunsford's (1991) distinction between three models for writing centers: storehouse centers, garret centers, and Burkean parlors. Lunsford's description of storehouse centers as "information storehouses, prescribing and handing out skills and strategies to individual learners" (p. 4) conjures an image of a center built for the accumulation and circulation of information. Lunsford's image of a Burkean parlor, on the other hand, conjures an image of an associational space in which people work collaboratively on creating "contextually bound" meaning (Lunsford, p. 8). The walk-in writing center, with its emphasis on individualized instruction and negotiation in a low-risk environment, is supposed to help students and tutors work together to create "contextually bound" meanings that allow students to continue on with their writing.

An OWL Logo from 1994, from the glory days of the 3.5" floppy disk

Given the state of technologies in 1995-1997, the OWL could not support a Burkean Parlor model, even though that is what Mickey and I wanted. Although Mickey originally saw e-mail as another avenue by which students and tutors could work together, students did not use the e-mail service in that way. The heaviest OWL traffic was experienced instead by the automatic e-mail server, through which users could receive handouts automatically. "[W]e quickly learned," writes Harris (1995), "that what we had included as a minor convenience to our e-mail service, our handouts, became the major attraction" (n.p.). What Harris had envisioned as an online Burkean Parlor (i.e., the use of e-mail to allow tutor and student to work together) ended up becoming for users a preferred means of circulation. For whatever reason, be it the medium or users' pre-existing conceptions of writing as the accumulating of "correct" rules of grammar, much of the OWL's e-mail traffic related to acquiring handouts or asking lower-level grammar questions..

In the nearly 20 years that stand between my work at Purdue's OWL and the moment at which I write this, I wonder whether my concerns still stand regarding whether any online technology truly promotes the kinds of models a writing center would want. Has the OWL (and have other online centers) adapted new technologies that might make online spaces more about conversation than circulation of handouts? Even though some writing centers, such as Michigan State University's, experiment with applications like Second Life, a consultant's blog post at MSU shows that a steep learning curve can remain for those trying to work online (Turcotte, 2009). She writes about spending time teaching the student, a newbie to Second Life, to operate in that environment—time that would be unnecessary in a walk-in center. Perhaps the spread of services like Skype might change this.

Even with new applications, the urge to use the OWL primarily as a storehouse will remain strong. As I read the recent article by Salvo, Ren, Brizee, and Conard-Salvo (2009), for instance, I feared briefly that the circulation model remains predominant. Part of what Salvo et al. report on is their efforts to use usability techniques to update the handouts and navigability of Purdue's OWL. But then I realized that I had missed a larger point that Salvo et al. want to make.

What We Did While We Waited (Continued)

The OWL creates other opportunities for association, opportunities beyond the one-to-one encounter. As Salvo et al. state, the OWL can be "a site for building professional identity by illustrating how the technological artifact becomes a site of stakeholder interaction" (p. 120). That is, the OWL, and the writing center itself, can create an opportunity for various stakeholders (students in a professional writing course, faculty, and writing center tutors, for example) to work together "for the scholarly study of writing, technology integration, and research innovation" (p. 120). This is a point I missed nearly 20 years ago. At that time, I was focused on ways to use existing technology to promote the associational values that I thought a writing center ought to espouse. But I failed to see how the OWL could create opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to engage in scholarly inquiry, to reflect on what it means to work as a tutor in a writing center, and to speculate on the kinds of technologies needed to do that work. I only saw how the OWL failed to live up to face-to-face ideals, rather than to see the new opportunities that the technology created for its stakeholders.

Stuart Blythe is currently an associate professor in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Culture at Michigan State University.

The Purdue OWL 20th Anniversary Logo Design Project

During the Fall 2013 semester, the Purdue OWL Partnered with Don Unger's *ENGL 390: Computer Aided Publishing* course to redesign the Purdue OWL logo in honor of our 20th anniversary. The students produced a number of novel and interesting designs. While we could only pick one for use on the OWL and in our 20th anniversary marketing, we here present to you all the original designs that sprang forth from this collaboration.

Nocturnal OWL
by
Ashley Alexander, Myles Madey, Andrew Martin, and Broc Smith
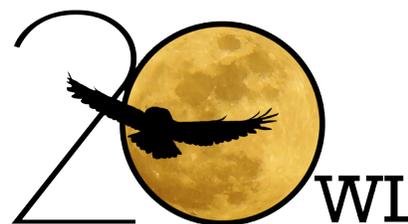
The Flying Moon Logo
by
Kaitlyn Neis, Eric Thompson, Alexandra Hoff, Rachel Rapkin

A Safety Branch for Writers
by
Christine Calache, Morgan Herrold, Louis Wyatt, Katie Long

A WiFi OWL
by
Bradley Williams, Mary Adkins, Nicole Salem, and Savannah Smith

Memories of My Time as OWL Technical Coordinator: A Time of Constant Change

Erin Karper
OWL Technical Coordinator,
2000-2004

I became the technical coordinator for the Purdue OWL in May of 2000, at a time of exciting changes for both the OWL and the Writing Lab itself.

The biggest change that I helped to implement was the revision of the main OWL Web site.

When I came on board, the OWL Web site was organized into one huge master index page that linked to Web-based "handouts" whose file names contained numbers. The numbers corresponded to the numbers on the file cabinet where the original print versions of the handouts were kept in the Writing Lab. While this did help us maintain continuity between the materials given out by the Writing Lab and the materials available online, it was not an efficient nor effective way to organize online materials, especially the large number of digital-only materials that people were developing, such as hypertext workshops and PowerPoint presentations.

While on a bus to Cincinnati, it hit me that we could organize primarily by type of material with lots of cross-linking, and the four-section design was born: information about the OWL and the Writing Lab; handouts; workshops and presentations; and Internet resources. Dr. Harris's son-in-law's web consulting firm helped to develop some templates that could be used in a new Web site design that highlighted our new OWL logo, and they conducted a survey of Web users who visited the OWL and sent us the data. Then Dave Neyhart and I spent most of the summer of 2000 converting the old material to the new templates. I used to dream in HTML most nights while we were doing the conversion! I remember Mickey Harris was thrilled when we developed a script to provide a slideshow of Writing Lab pictures on the main index page.

An OWL Birthday · Special Logo Design for Erin Karper by Purdue OWL Staff

On August 1, 2000, we launched the new site with this announcement: "August 1, 2000: Purdue's OWL gets a new look and a new organization. As you can see, we've made some big changes to the look and organization of Purdue's OWL. We decided that it was time for a big change. Why? Well, the site has been growing steadily for five years, and in that time we've expanded from just providing handouts to providing presentations, workshops, Internet resources, and information about other online writing labs. Our new organization reflects the variety of media that we provide." We also launched a new search engine that more efficiently indexed the site.

Data from the survey revealed to us that users really wanted a weekly newsletter, so we launched the Purdue OWL News in January 2001 to provide updates about OWL and the Writing Lab as well as to answer people's questions about grammar and writing. People sent us the most fascinating questions for our Q&A column. Some of my favorites included: What is the preferred way to present profanity in formal writing? F--k? F*#k? and the one who wanted to know the correct way to use "rear-end" as a verb when describing car accidents. Interaction with our users was always the best part of the job for me; people emailed questions for the OWL News, questions to the OWL Mail tutors, and general questions and comments about the site, and I read most if not all of them.

It was fascinating to realize that people all over the world relied on the little Web server covered in ceramic owls sitting behind my desk. (People who saw the OWL in person always said, "But it's so small!") I always loved to hear about the many uses to which OWL was put: teaching prisoners, teaching ESL students, settling arguments, improving composition classes, creating resumes, and writing in the workplace. People quibbled with our rules and advice (especially about the apostrophe!) but more often they praised us for helping them to become better writers. One of my favorite ones came from an Estonian orthopedist's office, who sent the OWL staff an animated Easter card with the message: "May your Easter be happy and bones strong!" Our users challenged us to keep the site relevant, current ("What do you mean you haven't updated your MLA and APA guidelines yet?! The new manual's been out for three days!"), and appropriate for a variety of learners and teachers. Ultimately, our users were really the greatest agents of change.

Other big changes during my four years at OWL included the hiring of a new director, Dr. Linda Bergmann, and associate director, Tammy Conard-Salvo. We remodeled the Writing Lab to make more room for them, and I held my breath

Memories of My Time as OWL Technical Coordinator (Continued)

when we migrated the servers across the room to their new cubicle, trying to minimize downtime to as little as possible. Of course, when everyone in the world is using your Web site, it's hard to schedule "convenient" downtime! (We had hits from every continent except Antarctica. I always wanted to see if someone down at McMurdo Station would be willing to visit the site just so I could say that we'd had visitors from all seven!)

One of my favorite things to do every month was to run the Web statistics program that would analyze the logged data and spit out information about who was visiting the site, where they were coming from, and where they were spending their time. Because the log files were so huge, I would start running the program in the morning, go and get lunch, and then a few hours after lunch I'd have a log file to look at. It was amazing to see how our "hits" grew and grew, always in the millions per month but steadily growing every month that I was there; it almost seemed as if there could be no upper bound to the people who were interested in our site. The most popular pages were always our APA and MLA style guide pages, so those always received special priority when it came time for updates and maintenance.

I was never bored and always busy as OWL Technical Coordinator: in between classes and dissertation data collection, you could find me updating the Web site, adding art, writing the Purdue OWL News, implementing interactive quizzes, digitizing several decades' worth of the Writing Lab Newsletter, giving workshops, or attending the deliciously catered staff meetings and potlucks! I count myself fortunate to have worked there with such wonderful people and such freedom to experiment, try out new approaches and techniques, and interact with people from all over the world. I was there to fete the OWL at 10 (we did consider photoshopping a party hat onto the O in the OWL logo but decided that it would probably be a bad idea); I'm thrilled to continue to celebrate it at 20.

Erin Karper is currently an associate professor in the College of Arts and Sciences at Niagra University.

The Purdue OWL 20th Anniversary Logo Design Project

The winning design (below) was created by Craig Cainkar, Jessica Schwingendorf, Natalie Merced, and Steven Thorton. This design was modified slight by Purdue OWL Coodinators Joshua M. Paiz and Caitlan Spronk to include the familiar eye element of our day-to-day logo. Beginning in January 2014, this logo has been rolled out to the main portions of the Purdue OWL. It is also being heavily used on a number of promotional items.

A Modern Logo for a Modern OWL (Winning Design)
by
Craig Cainkar, Jessica Schwingendorf, Natalie Merced, and Steven Thorton

Final Logo Design
Based on
"A Modern Logo for a Modern OWL"

Helping Writers World Wide
(Alternative Design by Winning Team)
by
Craig Cainkar, Jessica Schwingendorf, Natalie Merced, and Steven Thorton

20 OWL Purdue University

The Purdue OWL and My Professional Development

Brian Yothers
OWL Coordinator, 2002-2003

My career trajectory has doubtless been a bit different from many past OWL Coordinators, and certainly anyone considering my current position as a faculty member teaching early and nineteenth-century American literature might wonder how a year as OWL Coordinator and several more years as an OWL contributor and tutor fits with the path I've followed.

I can say without hesitation, however, that the time I spent on OWL was among the most professionally formative of all of my graduate school experiences. As someone who was both intrigued by the possibilities of technology for teaching writing and at times overwhelmed by what I needed to learn, I was tremendously fortunate to work with Erin Karper, the Technical Coordinator who put an indelible stamp on OWL that has always been apparent through the subsequent revisions of the site. Erin was knowledgeable, patient, and an excellent teacher for me as well as for her students.

Several things struck me about my experience with OWL: first, I was always encouraged by the tremendous eagerness shown by students at Purdue and from every state in the United States and it seemed virtually every country around the world for both the sort of clear, practical advice on writing that we provided in our handouts and PowerPoint presentations and for the thoughtful dialogue about their writing that our online writing consultations provided. Second, I found that both the OWL and the face-to-face components of my experience in the Writing Lab shaped my approach to teaching more than almost any other experience in graduate school: I learned to ask more questions, to take less for granted, and to allow myself to be in positions where I wasn't always the expert. Third, the question of usability, which came up in virtually every conversation we had about the site (how will this site be useful to someone working with a slow dial-up connection in a setting without broadband as well as to someone who enjoys access to a university network?) has stayed with me in my work with digital projects ever since. In research-

related roles like editing or reviewing articles for scholarly journals, I find that my time with OWL invariably forms the backdrop for how I think about electronic communication with writers about their writing, and what I learned from Mickey Harris about being at once affirming, rigorous, nimble, and fully engaged in working with writers has been an essential part of my identity as a teacher and a scholar.

Even over the course of the last ten years since I last worked on the OWL, a great deal has changed, both in the digital resources generally available for teachers of writing and literature and on the OWL itself. I've been thrilled to watch the site evolve from a distance, and every year when I introduce the OWL to my students, there are new developments for me to describe to them.

OWL Logo c. 1995. Pointing the Way to Writing Assistance

The YouTube videos showing how to, for example, format an MLA-style essay in Microsoft Word represent a kind of assistance that we really wouldn't have been able to provide in any consistently usable way back in 2003. One other constant is that there are few better ways of generating goodwill among undergraduate and graduate students alike at the beginning of the semester than to mention that I once worked on Purdue's Online Writing Lab. I've also enjoyed tracking how often among acquaintances on Facebook whom I knew before my time on OWL who are teaching in middle schools, high schools, community colleges, or universities questions about resources for teaching writing come up. Invariably, one of the first responses they receive from other teachers begins "Do you know about this great website at Purdue University?..." The amount of appreciation that people feel for the site and what it does is immense, and being part of it is one of the more substantial privileges of my academic career.

Brian Yothers is currently an associate professor in the Department of English at the University of Texas El Paso

2012-2013 Purdue OWL Statistics

Have you ever wondered just how busy the Purdue OWL is? Or what goes into creating Purdue OWL content? Well, here's a sneak peak.

- 248,242,901 Purdue OWL pages served worldwide
- 17.1 Terrabytes of data transferred to users worldwide
- 293,277 *YouTube* channel views (OWL@Purdue)
- 33 new content development projects
- 30 total content developers
- 722.5 hours spent on content development

Purdue OWL 20th Anniversary Vidcast

In August of 2013, we sat down with retired writing center director Muriel Harris, Linda Bergmann, Tammy Conard-Salvo and members of the Purdue OWL staff for a conversation of the past and possible futures of the Purdue OWL. The video is available on our YouTube Channel, or through the following link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6OTlRPdP50&feature=share&list=PL9C5Gc2Rka0ah4XslC3YAgjYcHlLsMlcg&index=1

Beyond the OWL Office: On the Long-Term Impact of the Purdue OWL

Dana Lynn Driscoll
OWL Coordinator, 2006-2007
OWL Technical Coordinator, 2007-2008

I remember a day back in 2007, when I was working as OWL Coordinator. I went into a grocery store in my hometown when I was visiting for holiday break. I was purchasing some groceries for our upcoming holiday meal and was at the checkout lane. A college-age girl took my credit card, looked at it, and said, "You're Dana Driscoll!"

And I responded, "Yes, I am. Do you need to see my ID?" She responded, "You wrote the primary research material on the Purdue OWL! I used it in my English 100 class and it saved my life. I love the OWL!" I was a bit floored and managed to get out, "Yeah, I did write that material. Glad you found it helpful." I know that I'm not the only person to have worked on the Purdue OWL that has had such experiences—and I think sometimes those of us who have dedicated our time and energies to developing the OWL forget about the long-ranging impact of that work.

When I was working on the OWL, one of the big projects that we undertook was to design and enact a set of usability and accessibility tests for the at-the-time newly redesigned OWL (this was Karl Stolley's 2007 design, much of which is still being used today). Michael Salvo, Allen Brizee (later OWL Coordinator), Morgan Sousa, and I were the primary team who worked on the testing. Once our year or so of usability tests were completed, Allen and I spent a great deal of time making revisions to the content, taxonomy, and design based on our usability findings—all of this was to ensure that the OWL be as user-friendly and accessible as possible. As part of these tests, we did a remote survey and learned about how people were using the Purdue OWL worldwide—again I remember reading the comments, from teachers in Zimbabwe and college students in China to single mothers in Turkey and middle-school students here in the States, and realizing just how important the work we were doing really was. In 2007-2008, the summer I took over as OWL coordinator, we learned that we had broken a million OWL visits (and it's much, much higher now). The numbers told us the sheer volume of users, but it was the stories from our survey that told us of the OWL's impact.

Since finishing my Ph.D. and leaving Purdue, I am continually struck by the long-ranging impact of the Purdue OWL. People in a variety of fields at my university, from Nursing to Business to Library Science know about the OWL and use it in their courses. If they happen to learn that I was part of the OWL staff, they excitedly talk to me about how much they love the OWL, how it is useful, and how it "saved my students' writing and saved my sanity" (yes, a nursing professor really told me this last year).

I think that it was easy for the OWL staff—coordinators, content developers, Writing Lab tutors answering email, Writing Lab Administrators—to get tunnel vision about the work and lose sight of the broader impact that we were making. The success of the OWL often contributes to the overwhelming amount of work to be done, from server maintenance to OWL mail requests, from database management to new content development. We lost ourselves in the work, and sometimes, we needed moments like those described above to really understand how what we do matters. In reflecting upon these experiences in my time since leaving Purdue, I have gotten a good sense of how much the work we do on the Purdue OWL matters. To all of the Alumni who contributed to the OWL, be it through answering OWL Mail questions, contributing or revising content, developing the site or dealing with copyright requests—thank you. To those who work each day to ensure the OWL's success—thank you. Thank you for helping make the OWL one of the greatest writing resources on the web. To those of you at Purdue now—if you haven't already, please take the opportunity to contribute to the OWL and to make a difference in the literate lives of writers worldwide. I'm glad that I had the opportunity to make contributions to the OWL, and that work has continued to have lasting impact in my life and in the lives of my students.

Dana Lynn Driscoll is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric at the Oakland University
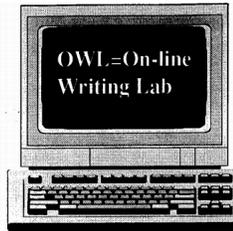
Defining OWLs Logo c. 1994-1995

20OWL
Purdue University

Purdue OWL Coordinators Throughout the Years

Purdue OWL Staff Throughout the years a small number of individuals have been tasked with coordinating various aspects of the Purdue OWL. Currently, the Purdue OWL is staffed by two coordinators. Our technical coordinator oversees the back-end of the Purdue OWL. She keeps the OWL flying high by wading through lines of code and by adding new functionalities to the Purdue OWL. Our content coordinator oversees the direction of OWL expansion and hires new content developers to execute this vision. They also handle matters of copyright and user relations. Both of these individuals are well supported by the Writing Lab's director and associate director.

Presently, the Purdue OWL is staffed by Technical Coordinator Caitlan Spronk, a fourth year Ph.D. student from Rhetoric and Composition, and Content Coordinator Joshua M. Paiz, a third year Ph.D. student from Second Language Studies/Applied Linguistics.

Below are images of some of the OWL coordinators past and present.

Stuart Blythe, coord., 1995-1997

Brian Yothers, coord., 2002-2003

Allen Brizee, coord., 2007-2010

Erin Karper, tech. coord. 2000-2004

Elizabeth Angeli, coord., 2010-2012

Caitlan Spronk, tech. coord, 2011-Present

Jeff Bacha, tech. coord., 2008-2010

Joshua Paiz, coord., 2012-Present

## The OWL at 20: A Space for Writing, Technology, and Civic Engagement

Allen Brizee
OWL Coordinator, 2007-2010

"So. What do you know about coding?" When I first met Karl Stolley in 2005, he was preparing to launch the revised Purdue OWL, a version of the online writing resource that followed cutting edge design principles and adhered to W3C and section 508 accessibility standards. This new OWL, Karl said, would be much more usable and easier to work on from the "back end."

In my response to his query about coding, I admitted that I didn't know as much as he did. I said that my work focused on technical communication and service-learning. "Oh, that's fine," he replied, which confused me at the time. When I became Coordinator in 2007, I finally understood what Karl meant by his response because I realized the OWL's impact on writing, technology, and civic engagement.

The OWL's influence on writing and technology may be obvious, but what is less obvious is the OWL's recent impact on civic engagement. Born in the tradition of land-grant university extension, the Purdue OWL has shifted closer to participatory civic engagement and "Web 2.0" design in the past decade. Now, users routinely suggest changes and even contribute to new projects like the MLA and APA classroom posters. While serving as an excellent source of writing information, the OWL is much more than a reference: it's a space for research and a space for civic engagement. The OWL's Engagement section is a good example of this type of work. From 2007 to 2010, my colleague, Jaclyn Wells, and I collaborated with two literacy organizations from Lafayette, Indiana, to develop and test the Community Writing and Education Station (CWEST), a set of resources focused on helping people pass the written section of the GED and helping people write job search documents for entry-level positions.

When I first joined the OWL team, however, I didn't realize the OWL's significance. But as I received hundreds of messages from users around the globe, I realized that our resource was incredibly important to people from Lafayette and to people from other countries. This point was made clear to me when I received a message from an instructor in northern Iraq who was teaching Kurdish elementary school teachers how to write in English. They didn't have money for books, but they did have a laptop, a satellite link, and a printer. With these three pieces of technology, she was able to use the OWL to teach Kurdish teachers how to write more effectively in English, so that they, in turn, could teach their young students.
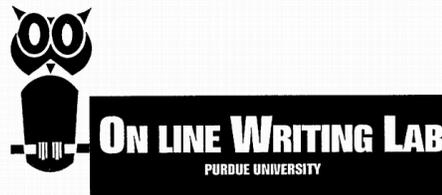
The OWL, it seems, has come full circle. The OWL's interplay of writing, technology, and civic engagement has taken composition resources from the "ivory tower" to the cornfields of Indiana, and it has delivered them to the remote fields of northern Iraq. In doing so, the OWL has been a spark of inspiration for its users and for the people who have maintained it. I'm honored to have worked on the OWL team and to have contributed to this wonderful resource. At my current institution, Loyola University Maryland, I continue to use the OWL to help my students and to guide my work with local at-risk communities in Baltimore.

Allen Brizee is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Writing at Loyola University Maryland

Defining OWLs Logo c. 1997

Jeff Bacha creatively shows his frustration with the OWL's code

The Purdue OWL in the late-1990's

The OWL at 20: A Space for Writing, Technology, and Civic Engagement

Jeff Bacha
OWL Tehcnical Coordinator,
2008-2010

My relationship with the OWL started well before I started working for the organization as a web developer. As a graduate student and TA at Georgia State and Purdue, I not only used the website's resources in my own studies, but also incorporated a lot of what the site had to offer in my teaching practices.

The experience of being a user proved to be very beneficial when I started working as the OWL's web developer and started redesigning the OWL's Family of Sites and the CMS running the digital environment. Although the current design, as I left it, is not perfect and needs some further testing, I will always be grateful for the knowledge I gained about interface design, information architecture, building taxonomies, user experience design, how to incorporate social media outlets into a major website, and issues of usability. I still use the OWL, include it in my teaching, and still talk about my experiences in the articles I write or whenever I give a talk about usability and the complicated process of trying to design a website that averages over 180,000,000 page views a year.

In my mind, the best part about working for the OWL was interacting with the large community of users who continue to support the project, offer suggestions about growth, correct our errors, and communicate to us their vision of what the site should be. My proudest accomplishment associated with working as the OWL's web developer for a number of years was continuing the organization's tradition of user-centered design. I can say with pride that the website design I created for the OWL was not just a labor of love, but also the culmination of ideas, feedback, and suggestions provided by the users themselves.

Jeff Bacha is currently an assistant professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham

The Purdue OWL before its most recent redesign in the early 2000's

A Collaborative Success
20 Years in the Making

Elizabeth L. Angeli
OWL Coordinator, 2010-2012

Like most Purdue OWL users, I used the OWL for years before stepping foot onto Purdue's campus. I referred to the site as a high school and college student, a writing teacher, and writing tutor.

A few months after I began my PhD at Purdue in 2008, I started working on the OWL as a content developer, contributing to the resource that offered me, my students, and countless others writing assistance. My experiences teaching with and writing for the OWL proved useful when I served as the sixth OWL Coordinator from 2010 to 2012.

In my two years as Coordinator, I built on the strong resources the Coordinators before me created, and I responded to OWL users' requests for more resources. My goals as Coordinator, as a result, included developing multimedia resources and expanding the "Subject-specific Writing" section to include a lesser-known subject: veterinary technology. With the support of the Writing Lab directors, Linda Bergmann and Tammy Conard-Salvo; Webmasters, Jeffrey Bacha and Caitlan Spronk; and dedicated content developers, we achieved these goals and more.

We launched the Purdue OWL YouTube Channel in 2011. The channel was an instant success thanks to the OWL content developers who were eager to extend the OWL's written resources to video. In addition to videos about writing job documents, citing sources, and using rhetorical principles, the channel also allowed us to showcase the OWL's home, the Purdue Writing Lab, in a video tour.

Another important addition to the OWL was "Writing as a Veterinary Technician." Two content developers, Purdue veterinary technician faculty, and I collaborated to create this first-of-its kind writing resource in the veterinary technician field. Veterinary technician program faculty from throughout the US sent us positive feedback, thanking the OWL for this resource.

Now, as a professor at Towson University, I share the OWL and my experiences working on it with my students. Students learn important lessons, as I did, in how to communicate with a world-wide audience, and they enjoy hearing stories about the OWL, a resource they have been using for at least 10 years.

The best part of working on the OWL, though, was interacting with global users. OWL users are a large part of the OWL's 20-year success and growth. This resource offers so much to writers around the world: from lawyers at state departments, to librarians at the FBI library, to English teachers and students in Africa. In turn, these writers drive OWL staff to develop and sustain the site. The OWL has provided the world with a one-of-a-kind writing resource and will continue to do so for at least 20 more years.

Elizabeth L. Angeli is currently an assistant professor in the Department of English at Towson University

Propsed OWL Mail Logo c. 1995

The Purdue Writing Lab:
We give a hoot about writing.
http://owl.english.purdue.edu

An early version of the current Purdue OWL logo, complete with a playful tagline

The Purdue OWL and L2 Writers

Joshua M. Paiz
OWL Coordinator, 2012-Present

Over the past twenty years, the audience of the Purdue OWL has changed a great deal. When the web-version of the Purdue OWL first took flight during the spring of 1994, its mission was to help meet the needs of writers at the Purdue University West Lafayette Campus, as well as to needs of writers throughout the state of Indiana. As access to the web grew, so too did the number of people using the Purdue OWL, and this expansion led to new groups of users from outside of the United States. The growth of our global user-base led us to consider how the OWL might best meet the needs of a myriad number of multilingual writers—individuals who may be writing in English as a second or an additional language.

The OWL's role in expanding the outreach of Purdue University led to a great number of conversations regarding the needs of second language writers. From the outset, we were aware that although we wanted to adequately support this diverse population, we could not be everything to everyone everywhere. This led to partnerships with English-as-a-second Language/Second Language Studies (ESL/SLS) Program and with the Lafayette Adult Resource Academy as early ways to ground our attempts to meet the needs of second language (L2) writers.

These partnerships led to the creation of two banks of OWL materials targeting L2 writers. The content created in conjunction with the ESL/SLS and with the Rhetoric and Composition programs targeted the needs of L2 writers in the college/university setting. These resources addressed teacher

Symbolic Barn OWL by C. Reaves

expectations of writers in mainstream composition classrooms in higher education contexts across the US. This took the form of a cultural introduction to American classrooms. To address the needs of users in diverse national contexts, we added two context-dependent business-writing resources, specifically in the Indian and Chinese business contexts. The World Englishes framework, one that acknowledges local varieties of English, largely informed these resources.

The second set of resources, developed by a doctoral student specializing in second language writing, were developed for and in close conjunction with the Lafayette Adult Resource Academy (LARA). LARA offers high school equivalency, ESL, and vocational education to Lafayette area residents. Students in these community-based classes tended to have lower English proficiency and needed writing assistance that might help with the writing section of the GED examination. These resources largely focused on grammatical and mechanical correctness, and we updated many of these resources in 2010.

In June of 2012, I began my first full semester at the helm of the Purdue OWL. As a professionalizing applied linguist and an L2 writing researcher, I brought with me a desire to revisit and revise our L2 writing resources. To begin this process, we commissioned three content development projects specifically targeting L2 writers. By mid-fall 2012, these resources were ready to go online; they were dedicated to issues of audience, plagiarism avoidance, and tips for writing in North American higher educational contexts. Three very motivated content developers, all of whom had experience teaching L2 writing, developed the resources. As pleased as we were with these resources, we knew that more needed to be done.

We were missing three things: the voices of multilingual writers, any data on how OWLs were used outside of Anglophone countries, and what users in these countries needed from an OWL. To address the first issue, we recruited new content developers in the ESL/SLS program at Purdue that hailed from a number of international contexts, such as Korea, China, Libya, and Poland. The recruitment of these content developers was a boon to the Purdue OWL and to the service that we attempt to provide to our multilingual writers around the globe. These developers helped to expand L2 writing resources by creating exercises on topics like audience awareness and summary writing, developing a guide to commonly used academic writing terms, and revamping currently existing OWL resources to be more linguistically accessible to advanced-level L2 writers.

To address the next two issues, the issue of a data shortage and users' needs, we engaged in a six-month long research project. At the beginning of the Fall 2012, we sent out an IRB-approved survey to L2 writing teachers around the globe. We wanted to uncover two things. First, how this group made use of the OWL and, second, what the group felt it needed from the OWL. We wanted to know what kind of resources they needed in order for OWLs to be more useful to students. The findings from this survey research have helped in opening conversations with writing center professionals in Poland, Japan, and China. They have also served to inform our expansion plans towards L2 writing resources as we

The Purdue OWL and L2 Writers

neared our twentieth anniversary.

We have partnered closely with Professor Margie Berns of the SLS program to develop a whole new batch of resources for L2 writers. These will include resources addressing MLA and APA, TESOL/IELTS writing, and some of the major genres that writers encounter in the international composition classroom at Purdue. These resources will also bring a very diverse content development team aboard with years of experience both teaching and being L2 writers, and will include both traditional static resources and dynamic video resources. We have also launched a new research project that will attempt to uncover and inform best practices for developing instructional resources for L2 writers. We look forward to launching these resources on the OWL and to sharing our research results during the fall of 2014.

OWL TECH

Caitlan Spronk
OWL Technical Coordinator,
2011-Present

Working on the OWL has been an invaluable part of my education that I hope other graduate students will continue to experience in the future.

I'm an advocate for the mutual benefits the humanities and technology can offer each other, and being the OWL webmaster has only heightened that awareness for me. In my time as the OWL webmaster, I've learned so much about running a medium-sized website that I never would have learned running a small site of my own—how do my programming choices affect server load? What happens when the database connection file is included from every single page? (Answer: you have to change a lot of files when you switch servers.) One of the most enlightening aspects of working on the OWL has been interfacing with people at all levels of technological expertise, from career sys admins at Purdue, to users who write in to ask me why the OWL broke their printer. It's easy to forget when working on one's personal website that this fascinating code puzzle is in the end for other people to use, but the OWL doesn't let you forget that, especially when—ooops—you bring down the entire OWL one Sunday afternoon.

It has also highlighted for me the fact that the people who build the code really do have a lot of control over the technologies we use every day, and I've probably been guilty myself of pushing decisions because of their technological ease rather than any considered evaluation of end use. This is wisdom I will take with me into my work as a humanist working with technology. My work on the OWL has served to strengthen my belief that it's vitally important that at least some of us (compositionists, humanists) speak the language of code.

Every year, the OWL receives more hits, and our number of resources continues to expand. One of the challenges I've faced as OWL webmaster is moving to a new server environment that will better handle the increased demands on the OWL. That move brought with it the need to refactor old code, and highlighted the need for me and future webmasters to learn to streamline our code and stay knowledgeable about new techniques to remain relevant. I'm currently working on strategies for refactoring legacy code written by different people so that all of the backend code works the same way, which will hopefully make the OWL more flexible and robust for the future.

Another challenge the OWL faces as we move into the future is the tension inherent in serving users at both ends of the technology spectrum. While many North American users view our site on mobile devices equipped with the newest responsive technology, many of our international users view our site on older machines with slow connections. While we've received any number of humorous emails about the OWL being stuck in the 90s from the former group, we are actively seeking redesign strategies that will keep us relevant for both groups.

Many people have worked to make the OWL what it is today, and I feel their presence as I work on the bricolage of code that makes the OWL run. This legacy has been both an interesting challenge as well as a blessing in my work to inhabit the mindset of previous developers as well as learn from what my predecessors have written. I hope that my own influence on the OWL will be a positive one, and that future OWL webmasters will learn from me, as I've learned from those that have gone before me.

Barn OWL Pair by C. Zeaves

Caitlan Spronk is the curent technical coordinator for the Purdue OWL and a Doctoral Candiate in the Rhetoric and Composition Program

My Personal Relationship with the OWL

Tammy Conard-Salvo
Associate Director of the Purdue
Writing Lab, 2003-Present

I started using the OWL when I began tutoring as a graduate student at Texas Tech. The OWL was and still is a unique writing center innovation, one of the earliest examples of a writing center technology that tutors, directors, and users readily embraced.

When I took my first job in writing center administration in Boston, I relied on the OWL heavily when helping students and when training tutors, and I still reference it on a constant basis.

I have been witness to and have participated in the OWL's development for the past ten years. We have addressed ambitious projects relating to usability and engagement. We've added resources and categories and launched a YouTube channel. Users worldwide write to tell us how helpful the OWL has been, and I especially love it when students are already familiar with the site when they arrive on campus the first time.

Each year, a group of tutors and I welcome new students at Purdue's annual Boiler Gold Rush orientation. Thousands of students hear pitches from different academic units, and they collect quite a few promotional items in the process. They mostly try to ignore the brochures we enthusiastically shove in their hands, and some even insist that as engineering majors, they won't need to write much. All of the attempts to gain students' attention don't always work, yet when we mention that we're the home of the OWL, we see a flicker of recognition in their eyes.

Late Night Tasks by A. Queen

"Oh, the OWL! I know that site! My high school teacher made me use it."

Students who tell us some version of this statement come from Indiana and Illinois but also from Texas, California, Massachusetts, and elsewhere. We may not convince these students that writing remains part of their future, but we do remind them that the OWL still exists, and that it's still available to them. The name recognition of the OWL is powerful, and it's a testament to the site's ability to provide helpful information and address the diverse needs of a worldwide population.

Muriel Harris Tutor Development Fund

This fund was established in honor of Muriel "Mickey" Harris, who founded the Writing Lab in 1976 and retired in May 2003. The fund recognizes the groundbreaking work Mickey achieved in building an international writing center community. Your tax-deductible gift to this fund enables tutors in the Writing Lab to pursue professional development, and helps foster Mickey's longstanding philosophy of encouraging both undergraduate and graduate tutors to participate in conferences, presentations, and workshops.

If you would like to make a tax-deductible contribution, to the Harris Fund, to the Writing Lab or to the OWL, please make checks payable to the Purdue Foundation, with either The Writing Lab, OWL (Online Writing Lab) or Muriel Harris Tutor Development Fund in the memo line. Checks should be mailed to the following address:

Purdue Foundation
403 West Wood Street
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2007

You can also give online at https://donate.purdue.edu/Menu.aspx.

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