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Reframing Writing Teachers as Writers: Using Online Messages as Teaching Tools during Crisis and Beyond

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REFRAMING WRITING TEACHERS AS WRITERS: USING ONLINE MESSAGES AS TEACHING TOOLS DURING CRISIS AND BEYOND

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152 Pages

College writing teachers compose and write professionally often in our positions, but how often are we recognized as writers and not only as teachers of writers? During the sudden shift to emergency online learning during the COVID-19-interupted Spring 2020 semester, online communication became the primary, if not the only, way that college writing instructors were able to communicate with undergraduate students. Relying on surveys, interviews, and written artifacts, this dissertation investigates how college writing instructors at one Midwestern university learned to compose crisis communication messages to students in 2020–and what we have continued to learn and practice as online communicators with students since then.

Drawing on feminist research practices, writing studies scholarship, and social justice technical and professional communication research, this dissertation reframes writing teachers as writers of complex crisis and everyday communication to student audiences. I revisit and unpack writing teacher practices during Spring 2020 (Chapter 3), examining how people learned how to compose crisis communication messages, what tools and resources we relied on, and how we

responded affectively to writing as a writing teacher during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Just as importantly, in this writing studies approach to writing teachers, I investigate how communication practices mediated how writing instructors conducted classes throughout pandemic-impacted semesters, thought about ourselves as teacher-writers, and ultimately influenced our pedagogical practices. Extending this approach beyond initial crisis communication, I describe how writing teachers continue to practice online communication in divergent ways that align with our complex, shifting teaching and writing goals and values (Chapter 4). I conclude this dissertation with participant- and research-informed suggestions for how writing teachers and writing programs can work toward applying knowledge from this project to practice writing online communicative interaction messages to support teachers' writing and teaching goals for student learning. As one place to begin, I include an infographic that I composed that articulates how writing teachers can make small changes in how we use online messages to students as effective teaching tools.

KEYWORDS: rhetoric and composition; writing teachers; writing studies; pandemic discourse; technical and professional communication; college writing; communicative interactions; writing program administration

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E.C.

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CHAPTER I: UNDERSTANDING WRITING TEACHERS AS WRITERS

During the Spring semester of 2020, instructors and students at Illinois State University left for spring break knowing that there were cases of a serious illness, called COVID-19, rising in the US and the world. However, teachers were not aware that they would not be returning to campus for quite some time and they were not aware that classes would radically change for the next year and a half. Many students had never taken an online class before and many of the instructors had never taught an online class before. At Illinois State University, spring break was extended by one week, giving instructors time to convert their in-person classes to online courses. Only one week for instructors to completely rethink ways to present information, make decisions about whether to conduct class either synchronously or asynchronously, determine how and when to communicate with students, and more. While at first writing teachers at ISU might have thought to themselves that certain decisions would only be relevant for the last half of that Spring semester, the COVID-adaptable pedagogical practices would continue to be developed, altered, and transformed over the subsequent two, completely online, semesters.

Throughout the online semesters during a global pandemic, instructors were communicating with students in diverse ways using different everyday writing genres and tools that they might not have used previously or that they now needed to use in different ways. In addition, because of the grim reasons why the semesters were being taught online, the messages that instructors were sending to students would be considered risk and crisis technical communication, which is a specialized form of writing all on its own, with particular features and qualities not normally found in teacher-to-student communications. But how exactly were writing teachers communicating with students? What kinds of communication tools did they value to send nonrequired and compulsory messages? Furthermore, how did the COVID-19

pandemic change, blur, and complicate the distinction between compulsory and voluntary emails to students? Were writing teachers thinking about their communication practices with students differently as compared to a "normal" semester? And more importantly, how have writing teachers complicated their communication relationships through online messaging to fulfill certain functions in their classes? With all of the changes that instructors were making to their methods of communication, it is also important to think about how they learned to communicate with students in online spaces, whether through research, discussions with other instructors, program or department advice, or learning by doing in the moment.

Writing teachers sending online messages to students can be mundane activities and arguably undervalued texts of teacher to student communication, yet online messaging was utilized heavily during the pandemic semesters and was being used in ways that it had not been previously. While online messaging between the writing instructor and students was perhaps optional in the past, it was suddenly no longer optional – it became one of primary means, if not the sole means, of communication. The online messages that instructors were sending students could already be considered occluded genres (Swales, 1996; Nederhiser, 2016) – writing instructors were not taught explicitly how to write online messages to students or taught what would be considered best practices, conventions, and rules of successful teacher-student communication. Then, during the last three years, composing online messages became so vital to teaching, communication, and student support.

My dissertation synthesizes how the areas of teacher research, writing studies, and technical and professional communication (TPC) illuminate how writing instructors navigated decisions when composing online communication messages to students during the COVID-19 pandemic. My dissertation necessitates interdisciplinary research and asks me to consider how

studying writing teachers' online communication can add to the fields collectively. For this dissertation, my primary research relied on survey and interview as the two primary methods of participant data collection, eliciting experiences and artifacts from writing instructors who taught courses during the COVID-19 pandemic and interacted with students during this time through online written communication. The survey asked instructors to provide online message artifacts that were sent during the COVID-19 pandemic and asked instructors to think about their experiences constructing the digital messages. I then conducted 60-90 minute interviews with writing instructors, looking at their email artifacts, analyzing them together, and discussing their experiences communicating with students during a pandemic.

The primary research questions for my dissertation are centered around four major threads:

1. How did instructors learn how to compose crisis communication messages to students, and what tools did they use to do so?
2. What were some of the affective responses of writing instructors when composing messages to students during the pandemic?
3. How did pandemic communication affect how writing instructors conducted classes, thought about their teaching, and practiced their pedagogical goals?
4. How do teachers use online communication in ways that align with their writing and teaching goals and values?

My dissertation will contribute to the field of rhetoric and composition, specifically in the areas of writing teacher education, writing program administration, and writing instructor mentoring. As a field, we should be invested in projects that render visible the mundane labor required of writing teachers daily and also illuminate how teachers learn to compose in everyday

writing texts that they are using to communicate with students. Teachers are spending a substantive amount of time and labor engaging with an activity that they are not explicitly taught which is explicitly undervalued. Many writing teachers in the US, and nearly all of the writing teachers at ISU specifically, are in contingent labor positions, so this is also a place that has the potential to affect people's jobs and livelihood. There is much at stake in online crisis communications, rendering them anything but straightforward and uncomplicated. From a student perspective, this research is also important in that undergraduate writing students, predominantly in their first year of college, were the recipients of critical crisis messages. In order for students to take up messages and engage with equity-based discourse and change, the teacher's messages should be clear, inclusive, and supportive.

This dissertation takes a writing studies approach to a specific composition site. I will investigate what some writing teachers learned from composing online crisis messages to students over the course of the pandemic and how that experience can be used as a place of education for all writing instructors moving forward. Writing teachers are not often studied as writers beyond the academic writing that they do and are not studied as professional writers in workplace communication situations. Just because writing teachers are professional writers in workplaces does not mean that they transfer that knowledge and use writing practices as teaching tools. There is a distinction between writing teachers as professional writers who were practicing crisis communication during the COVID-19 pandemic and writing teachers who can then leverage the pedagogical potential of crisis communication practices as teaching tools in any writing class. I want to illuminate what we as teachers can learn from other writing teachers, and I want to make visible the value of writing teachers' work and communication practices.

Writing teacher practices and learning

As I am working directly with writing instructors in this project, asking them about their teaching practices and experiences throughout the pandemic, research on writing teacher practices and learning is crucial. Scholars are beginning to do research on how the pandemic affected higher education teachers in general and how students were being supported during this time of crisis (Aristovnik, 2020). Other composition-specific scholars and educational institutions are also doing research on what writing teachers are doing during this time of crisis as well as suggesting what they should be doing moving forward (CWPA, 2020; Sheppard 2021). New instructors are also being taught how to teach college writing courses and how to communicate with students (Reed, 2020) as well as building relationships with students (Sybing, 2019). While scholars conduct research using similar methods as my study–surveys (Arisovnik, 2020; Sheppard, 2021; Reed, 2020), ethnographic research (Sybing, 2019), synthesis research and artifact collection (CWPA, 2020)–my study uses ethnographically-informed methods to study specific crisis communication practices of writing teachers during COVID-19 and relies on a literate activity approach to understanding writing as a complex, learned activity practices over time.

Teacher practices during the COVID-19 pandemic

After the Spring 2020 semester, which was when halfway through the semester all classes had to make the sudden shift to online learning, the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) put out a statement alongside the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to restate the core principles of writing instruction and how they can still be incorporated in a primarily online learning environment. The CWPA argues that the primary core principle for writing classes is to teach

writing through interpersonal interactions, writing-related activities, and interpreting texts. One primary concern is that writing students might feel disengaged from their instructor and classmates, and it is therefore the teachers' responsibility to help facilitate engagement. In this response, CWPA mentions *that* instructors should "provide students with more than one way to interact with the instructor" through not only email but also phone, discussion boards, announcements, and conferencing tools. However, other than to provide feedback on student work, the statement does not mention *how* to communicate with students through any of these platforms. The only other mention of email is to remind instructors that they are "not obligated to respond immediately to email at all hours and professional well being includes setting firm limits for online availability beyond what is reasonable" (CWPA, 2020).

In 2020, the Faculty of Public Administration at the University of Ljubljana launched a global survey to ask students about how their student life has been affected during the COVID-19 pandemic (Aristovnik, 2020). The majority of students indicated that out of all of the university bodies, teachers were the ones giving students the most direct support. US students mentioned that they were 'satisfied' with the support from teachers, mentioning teachers' use of email specifically. Some student responses indicated they were worried about the future of their academic and professional careers, but most students indicated that their biggest concerns were about being bored, anxious, and frustrated. Considering the results of this survey and moving forward with higher education's response to the global pandemic, it is clear that all authorities involved should further prepare a set of proactive measures to properly support students and their learning. However, no details of those proactive measures were provided (Aristovnik, 2020). Even though the students surveyed indicated that they felt most support from teachers, according to the CWPA statement, writing instructors were not specifically told *how* to support students

through digital communication, just that they *should* support them through a variety of different modes and mediums.

As we move through this global pandemic, composition scholars are beginning to conduct studies and publish their findings on what writing instructors can learn from this experience. Jennifer Sheppard (2021) conducted an anonymous survey at the end of the Spring 2020 semester to ask writing studies instructors about the workload and pedagogical choices that were made during the sudden shift to online teaching. The results from her survey indicated that writing instructors were spending an average of four additional hours per course, per day on planning, teaching, grading, or communicating (p. 62). She also found that one third of those teachers indicated that they felt both overwhelmed and often burned out trying to respond to students' posts, drafts, emails, and requests for virtual appointments as they felt constantly on-call and available in this online environment (p. 63) with one instructor referring to having to do too much "hand-holding" with students (p. 68). Many instructors further specified that there was a vast increase of the number of student emails both sent and received during this first, chaotic pandemic semester (p. 64). Again, from Sheppard's research, there is no indication that these writing instructors were taught how to effectively change their pedagogical practices and communication methods with students from in-class learning to online learning environments. Her research also indicates that students were having difficulties understanding how to effectively and sustainably communicate with their instructors over email and other digital platforms as well, as they were not taught how to successfully do so either.

From Sheppard's survey results, writing instructors felt as if they were constantly chasing after students to turn in assignments and fulfill course requirements; therefore, it was very time consuming: "Being compassionate and flexible was necessary and the best way under the

circumstances, but it was a lot to ask" (p. 64). One of Sheppard's surveyed teachers commented that they "found the constant mediation (via technology) depressing. I felt totally disconnected from my students, who simply didn't exist for me as people at the end of the semester" (p. 67). Considering these survey results, the amount of emotional labor needed from instructors during this time had an effect on their pedagogical practices and outlook on the course itself. While many instructors saw the increased online communication with students as essential to supporting student success, other instructors implied that "attending to these logistical details was a time drain that took away from the 'real' work of teaching" (p. 68). Sheppard argues that such work is "not 'hand-holding' or 'just' clerical, but rather, is a key pedagogical orientation that helps to structure students' day-to-day and term-long learning" (p. 69). Sheppard also argues that "clear, consistent communication models writing practices that attend to rhetorical purpose and audience awareness" (p. 69). However, with neither the writing instructor nor the students taught how to compose and interpret crisis communication messages, the pedagogical potential of this medium seems to be lost. Writing teachers can recognize the importance of communicating with students as it connects to student success because writing teachers should want to help students to be better at directing their own learning and achieving (p. 75). Given that changing teaching environments and circumstances indicate that communication practices will change and necessitate alterations, it's important that all writing instructors recognize the importance of digital communication with students and that they are better prepared for how to communicate online effectively and sustainably toward their teaching goals.

Learning to communicate with students

Before the pandemic was affecting how writing instructors were interacting with students, composition scholars were already doing research on how writing instructors

communicate with students and build classroom communities. Roehl Sybing (2019) used ethnographic research to study how one writing teacher facilitated positive rapport between herself and students. Sybing argues that the popular perception of higher education is not necessarily centered around images of classroom discussion and student engagement, but rather around images of large lecture halls. However, writing classrooms usually have a fewer number of students in each section, making the space for more individual connections between instructor and students (p. 18). Sybing observed that teachers reaching out to students to co-construct knowledge in ways they can understand promotes active learning (p. 20). Teachers should be validating student knowledge and student participation, while also relinquishing their own role as sole authority. In this study of classroom observations and discussions with the instructor and students, neither Sybing nor the writing teacher observed and interviewed brought up digital communication as a way to facilitate student rapport deemed vital to student learning. Instead, this study focused on the in-class rapport during class discussion and activities as well as feedback on student projects. During the switch to online learning and increased online communication, the in-class rapport building that Sybing articulated, and that many writing instructors relied on, was no longer available, contributing to the frustrations that participants in Sheppard's survey found with online teaching.

In her research on new writing instructors, Meredith Reed (2020) discusses some of the strategies that graduate student writing instructors use when they begin teaching college writing for the first time. Often new instructors learn about the writing courses they are teaching and are instructed to make a course plan very briefly in an orientation session before the semester begins. During the chaos and flurry of constructing course plans, schedules, and activities, Reed finds that graduate instructors are "pedagogically scrambling" to use whatever they have at hand. She

uses the concept of bricolage to describe this process. After conducting interviews with multiple new graduate student instructors, Reed concludes that writing pedagogy educators can aid new instructors by determining whether their course plan pedagogy is haphazard patchwork or reflective experimentation. Receiving help in this process, new instructors will "understand teaching as dynamic, complex work requiring a bricoleur's ingenuity to master" (p. 122). Reed suggests the fundamental need of teaching new instructors *how* to construct pedagogical practices, rather than simply what documents to make (syllabi, prompts), as the practices themselves are vital for student learning and engagement. In other words, we need a distinction between teaching writing and being professional writers who produce texts that are teaching tools. It is not enough to inform teachers *what* different composition modes they should be constructing in – teachers should be taught *how* to compose online messages to students, *how* to have a successful online communicative interaction, and *why* they should be writing in particular ways to reach their teaching goals. The complicated writing that teachers do needs to be made visible.

Reed's research further illuminates that new instructors are not taught how to communicate with students especially through online classes using digital tools. Extending the concept of bricolage, Reed describes how instructors rely on past experiences of sending and receiving online communication as the foundation for how they approach this practice in their courses. New instructors determine how to construct an online message and communicate effectively with students based on their individual experiences, rather than by a set of best practices. In expanding this theory of bricolage further, Reed suggests this might be the tactic that many instructors used during the shift to online teaching during the pandemic: scrambling to find pedagogical tools and strategies that might work, based off their antecedent knowledge of

teaching writing in an in-person classroom or based off the antecedent knowledge of some of their peers. In addition to needing to make the learning and writing that teachers do visible all the time, in moments of crisis communication it is particularly important to make visible the pedagogical potential using technical communication in online messages and therefore using this medium as a teaching tool.

A sociocultural approach to studying teachers as writers

Contemporary research in composition does not often enough focus on how teachers are professional writers who work and write with everyday writing texts and genres. Through the survey, interview, and artifact collecting research in this dissertation, I study the occluded writing process of writing teachers communicating with students in digital spaces. In designing this study, I considered two questions: How can I and other researchers hope to make the writing that writing teachers do more visible and valued? How can we call attention to how online messages to students can be used as effective teaching tools? Both questions call for a literate activity research approach to thinking about writing as complex, situated, everyday activity.

This dissertation investigates one side of online communicative interactions between writing teachers and students: messages sent from teachers to students. While many TPC communications may be uni-directional, in that there is not an expectation to reply, the online messages that teachers write to students can be the initial outreach of communication, with the instructor either eliciting a reply or at least open to a reply from the recipients. While not all students will reply to all messages sent by instructors, the line of communication in the communicative interaction has been initiated. For the scope of this project, I am only going to be analyzing the initial outreach communication messages and interviewing only the instructors who sent the initial messages. However, in a future research project, it would be enlightening to

analyze threads of online messages between students and instructors as well as interview student recipients of instructors' online messages to understand their uptake of the communicative interaction.

My research into communicative interactions is aligned with writing studies scholar Paul Prior (2006), who uses a sociocultural approach to writing and literate activity systems, and others who have taken up this approach (Roozen, 2010; Walker, 2016). Sociocultural theory argues that activity is "*situated* in concrete interactions that are simultaneously *improvised* locally and *mediated* by prefabricated, historically provided tools and practices" (Prior, p. 55). Mediated activity involves both external acts, such as writing and interactions with other people and artifacts, and internal factors, such as perception and learning. Prior further articulates that a sociocultural approach to writing sees the act of writing as a mode of social action, not just a means of communication (p. 58). I use this definition of sociocultural approach to writing as a frame to examine communicative interactions from writing teachers to students.

Everyday communicative interactions

To situate how I understand communicative interaction, I will rely on Julie A. Hengst's (2020) research in *Understanding Everyday Communicative Interactions.* Hengst uses situated discourse analysis to examine how people navigate everyday communicative interactions and asserts that communicative interaction is a valuable object of study (pp. 3-4). Hengst argues that there are three key principles to communicative interaction: 1) They are always situated in sociocultural activities, 2) They draw on, and are shaped by, people's patterns of participation in sociomaterial spaces, and 3) Communicative resources are embodied and multimodal (p. 4).

In her work on communicative interactions, Hengst directs attention to three important points. First, rarely do we stop and analyze many of our everyday communicative interactions:

"As skilled social actors, we tacitly recognize and navigate the many sociocultural activities of our everyday lives, but rarely need to name them in any systematic way or trace the complex ways they are accomplished" (p. 7). It is important to analyze the entire communicative interaction to fully understand its complexity; however, for the scope of this project, I am starting small by analyzing the initial outreach of communication from the instructor to the student through online messaging. Teachers need to begin to understand the complicated communication systems that they are writing in and, in particular, putting different kinds of pressures on and shaping the entire complex range of communicative interactions with students online. The online messages that writing teachers send to students are everyday communicative interactions that teachers do not have time to actively analyze or trace every time we are composing them. Yet, the literate activity of online messaging to students is a complex participant in the system of the writing classroom that can mediate writing students' course experience and writing learning, even when teachers do not recognize it as such. Second, Hengst argues that "sociocultural activities are best identified in terms of the goals or objectives people are working to accomplish" (p. 8). When the activity is writing to students, teacher-writers have both teaching and writing goals when writing to students who have their own educational and learning objectives for their participation in a writing course. Finally, Hengst argues that it is important to think about the social voices that participants are using when communicating with one another: "Typified social voices are signaled by blends of typical content, addressees, and forms of language" (16). In communicative interactions between writing teachers and students during the pandemic, teachers had to face new writing situations when composing online messages during a global health crisis, blending typical teaching content with unanticipated pandemic urgency and language. As writers, teachers could only compose in relation to their

embodied and social identities, their evolving teaching identities, and their shifting writing identities; and they were doing so to more or less known groups of student "addresses" with often limited knowledge or understanding of students' changing pandemic circumstances, too

Hengst's three key questions to consider when using a situated discourse analysis to examine communicative interactions are: 1) What is going on here? 2) What are people's patterns of participation in this sociomaterial space? 3) What communicative resources are being used in this interaction? (p. 20). I used this heuristic when I created my survey to ask writing teachers about their communicative practices with students in digital spaces. I also wanted to see what patterns, if any, I could find of how writing teachers learned to participate in crisis communication and how they use writing as a teaching tool to support student learning during and beyond the initial COVID-19 crisis. I will provide more detail about this process in my next chapter on the methods and methodologies used for this dissertation.

Hengst also identifies successful communication. She argues that communicative success is an issue of alignment: "alignments around meanings, goals, people, resources, spaces, and activities…within a functional system" (p. 26). She argues that success is not about an individual's communication skills but rather how that person aligns with the sociocultural functional system (p. 28). It is important to consider how the communicator is using interactional resources to establish grounds that support communicative success (p. 38). Within my own project, it is not my goal to judge writing instructors on the messages that they have composed to students and determine which ones are "good" and which ones are "bad." Instead, I am looking at how instructors were working through a global health crisis and subsequent consequences through communicative interactions; how writing teachers were succeeding and not succeeding in and beyond moments of crisis; and how they have now revised and reframed their practices to

initiate future communicative interactions. In many cases, “success” in instructors' initial communicative interaction messages is about whether or not their messages accomplish the work of informing, explaining, supporting, teaching, or eliciting feedback or questions. “Success” could also mean that the instructor began a conversation with students or kept an on-going conversation going in some way. In my analysis of teacher responses and artifacts, I attune to what kinds of writing and teaching goals people created to be successful during pandemic online communication, what resources they drew on in order to accomplish divergent objectives, and how teachers saw their communicative interactions working for student learning support .

Studying communicative interactions through writing research

In my dissertation research, while I am analyzing various methods and modes of online messages that instructors send to students, I will use writing research as a literate activity research tool to describe how writing teachers communicate with students in online spaces towards particular teaching goals. Through my interviews, surveys, and artifact collection, my writing research will focus on teachers’ digital communication with students during the pandemic and what we can learn from it. I borrow from our field’s understanding of genres as a way for writing teachers to think more about their online messages to students and the contexts they are sending them in, and also to see the texts we produce in particular genres as existing in complex, interactive learning environments. My understandings of genre and activity emerge from work on rhetorical genre studies (Bawarshi and Reiff, 2010), activity theory (Russell, 1995; Russell 1997), and occluded genres (Swales, 1996; Nederhiser, 2016). As such, it is important to situate my genre researching practices in my understanding of what genres are, what they do, and how researchers study them.

Genre knowledge, learning, and power

Genre studies is a vital field for all writers who are engaging with texts that exist both in the writing classroom and outside of the classroom in order to accomplish a particular activity. Genres are constantly shifting to fit the needs of the activity system and community that engages with the genre. In Bawarshi and Reiff's (2010) research on genre studies, they emphasize the importance of understanding genre knowledge acquisition. Understanding genres can help to normalize activities and practices, enabling folks to participate in the genres in fairly predictable and familiar ways in order to get things done (p. 79). Yet, genre knowledge is "often tacitly acquired, ideologically consequential, deeply remembered and affective, and quite durable" (p. 86). It is difficult then to teach genres to newcomers and further, people who are entering a new community and learning how to both interpret and write in a new-to-them literate activity system are at a disadvantage to people already in the community who enact this power. It is difficult to learn genre knowledge – for both writing students and writing instructors – because we do not have equal access to all genres and do not have an equal knowledge base of genre conventions, thus further establishing an unequal power arrangement between teachers and students (p. 89).

Genre learning within activity systems

Similarly, David R. Russell (1995) argues that for experienced insiders in activity systems and professions, ways of writing in various genres may be so routine that they become natural (p. 515). Russell defines genre activity systems through five different characteristics: "1) historically developed, 2) mediated by tools, 3) dialectically structured, 4) analyzed as the relations of participants and tools, and 5) changed through zones of proximal development" (p. 5). Both writers and recipients interact with genres in complex activity systems. In the activity system of crisis communicative interactions from writing instructors to students during the

pandemic semesters, messages to students were not simple messages conveying information. Instead, the messages were emerging from a historically developed system of teacher-student communication, mediated by asynchronous writing tools across platforms, constantly being learned and therefore shifting the zones of proximal development of all writing learners involved–both teachers and students.

Equally vital to my understanding of genres is work on learning when, how, and where to use certain genres in relation to other genres and activity systems (Bawarshi and Reiff, 2010, p 91). Student writers can experience difficulties in writing new-to-them genres because there is more at stake than right and wrong task representations; their grades and success in the class are at stake as well (Russell, 1995, p. 519). Genre learning is also difficult because genres within activity systems are constantly changing based on the needs of the community members. For example, the activity system of communicative interaction with students changed for teachers during the Spring 2020 semester. The genre learning was changing for teachers who are participating in occluded activity systems that aren't visible to students, and for whom training and learning time was not a viable option during times of COVID-19 crisis.

Occluded genres and teaching writing

Ultimately, online messaging and communication between writing instructors and students would fall into the category of occluded genres. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the occluded nature of these communications had multiple causes, both related specifically to the sudden-change nature of pandemic communications, but also to the way these genres are undervalued as part of the repertoire of teacher-texts that teachers are expected to learn and use. John Swales (2004) defines an occluded genre in an academic space as "a genre that is 'out of sight' to 'outsiders and apprentices'; occluded genres perform "essential waystage roles in the

administrative and evaluative functioning of the research worlds" (p. 18). Swales (1996) argues that newcomers to an academic field, such as graduate students or junior staff, have particular difficulties in effectively matching the expectations of occluded genres as well as the expectations of the audience (p. 46). Most academics are faced with the challenge of figuring out for themselves how to write in these genres and activity systems, with some possible assistance from examples provided by colleagues or mentors who went through the same process themselves (Neaderhiser, 2016). This is similar to Reed's (2020) theory of bricolage: folks rely on the antecedent knowledge of themselves or their peers in order to write in new situations and venues. In addition, it is difficult for newcomers to produce occluded genres because expectations are shaped by local cultural values and traditions that are not explicitly taught or explained to newcomers (p. 46).

Not generally taught in the academy, occluded genres are not only present in research spaces, but just as importantly across all domains of professional activity including teaching. Regarding some pedagogical genres such as syllabi and assignment prompts, manuals and handbooks may give advice on how to write effectively within these genres and activity systems, such as *The St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing* (2018) and *The Longman Teaching Assistant's Handbook* (2008). However, many of these texts make presumptions about the occluded teaching genres that may not be apparent to junior scholars, especially scholars from non-English speaking cultures and linguistic backgrounds (Swales, 1996, p. 57). Additionally, such advice texts tend to focus on highly formulaic structures and templates with attention to different rhetorical situations and considerations, which can lead to risky consequences (Neaderhiser, 2016). Pedagogical occluded genres are important to understand clearly because they operate not just in the classroom, but outside of the classroom as well and are not restricted

to a single, situational purpose (Neaderhiser, 2016). Seeing such genres as occluded can demystify these genres and argue for their increased visibility. Stephen Neadershiser (2016) argues that the analysis of occluded genres should be further explored within composition studies because "our pedagogy is often centered on teaching students not only how to *write* various genres but also how to analyze the ways that genres operate, the roles that readers and writers play in those genres, and the rhetorical conventions that enhance (or inhibit) those genres' efficacy." By emphasizing the importance of understanding occluded pedagogical genres, we can develop an awareness of how genres operate not only in the classroom but also in other academic contexts where the writing teacher's identity plays a key role (Neaderhiser, 2016). My dissertation focuses on one possible occluded genre within teaching: online communication from teachers to writing students. It is my hope that my dissertation research can then help writing instructors and academic scholars see our literate activity as teachers as valuable and necessary to support student learning.

Chapter overview

This dissertation consists of five chapters, including this one. In Chapter 2, "Feminist Research Approaches for Studying Communicative Interactions from Writing Teachers to Students," I describe my feminist approach to research methods and methodology in this project. I describe how I define feminism, informed by interdisciplinary feminist scholars in and beyond rhetoric and composition. I also argue how the research that I am calling on within the field of writing studies, while they might not explicitly label themselves as feminist scholars, are doing feminist work based on my understanding of their qualitative research goals and practices. I also examine how social justice TPC and feminist TPC help to inform my research of writing teachers' crisis communication and reframe writing teachers as technical communicators.

In Chapter 3, "Communicating in a Crisis: Communicative Interactions During Spring 2020," I analyze data collected from surveys, interviews, interview questionnaires, and teacher artifacts about writing teachers' experiences in the Spring 2020 semester, the initial COVID-impacted semester when we shifted into emergency online learning halfway through the semester. I share participants' experiences teaching and writing during this semester and the crisis messages they were sending to students. Specifically, I chronicle the resources instructors drew on to create their initial communicative interaction messages (including tools, mentors, online research, peer support, and more). I investigate what teachers learned from their experience writing to students in crisis, connecting their experiences to TPC's understanding of bricolage. I analyze what writing instructors' writing and teaching goals and values and how those were represented in their email artifacts. I also focus on the emotional labor that is involved in writing to students and using online communicative interactions as a teaching tool.

Chapter 4, "Divergent Uptake of Writing Teachers' Online Communicative Interactions with Students Since Spring 2020," focuses on my analysis of data post-Spring 2020, pulling again from surveys, interviews, interview questionnaires, and teacher artifacts. I describe participants' divergent uptake of writing to students while mitigating ever-changing semesters of online, hybrid, and return to in-person teaching through 2022 (the time of this study). Specifically, I illuminate how participants' writing goals and values have changed as teachers–alongside their teaching goals and values–in ways that are still shaping their initial online communicative interaction messages with students as they are practicing writing with more awareness of writing as a part of multimodal teaching activity.

Finally, in Chapter 5, "Using Online Communicative Interactions Research to Support Writing Teachers as Writers," I demonstrate how writing teachers and writing program

administrators can work towards applying what I have elucidated in this study to put into practice online communicative interaction messages as effective teaching tools. After detailing some ways that writing teachers can "start small" with feminist technical writing practices with students, I describe how writing programs can support writing teachers, both new and experienced, with a writing research approach to online messages infused into existing structures of support. I end the chapter with an infographic as one tool for how writing programs can begin these conversations. The infographic demonstrates how writing teachers can make small changes to how we compose online messages to students in order to make them a successful teaching tool.

In my dissertation, I articulate and illuminate valuable knowledge and pedagogical understanding that can be taken away from this laborious and distressing pandemic and how that knowledge can be used to better initial online communicative interactions from instructor to students moving forward. I also elucidate the need for writing teacher education and mentoring in the particular area of online communication because many writing teachers have been historically excluded from institutional conversations and transparency in the workplace. This support of writing teachers would then aid students in improving their educational experiences and would work towards educational equity for all. My dissertation can serve as a tool to aid writing instructors and help them improve their online communication practices with students and use online messaging as a teaching tool. While we, as writing teachers, hope to never again have to compose online crisis messages in the future, if we can better understand what has happened, we make more research-informed progress as we move forward in academic years and situations that are still pandemic-impacted and endlessly complex.

CHAPTER II: FEMINIST RESEARCH APPROACHES FOR STUDYING COMMUNICATIVE INTERACTIONS FROM WRITING TEACHERS TO STUDENTS

To study communicative interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic by researching crisis messages written from writing teachers to students, I relied on what I see as feminist methodologies within writing studies and technical and professional communication (TPC). Writing studies values everyday writing and makes everyday writing visible as an embodied activity. TPC also values examining everyday writing practices and many current TPC scholars specifically work to reveal inequities in social systems. Many scholars in both fields engage directly with writers and audiences through artifact-based interviews, surveys, and analysis, as methods for recognizing the reality of writing situations rather than how writing would work theoretically and ideally. This project synthesizes research methods from scholars in both areas to see how they could work together and speak to one another to accomplish particular feminist research goals.

I want to be clear about what I mean by "feminist research." Since researchers define feminist research differently, I want to explicitly detail what I mean by my use of the phrase. For the purposes of this project, feminist research includes centering lived experience, valuing difference as an everyday fact, recognizing positionality, having an awareness of power and social structures, ethical and transparent decision making, and working toward change for vulnerable populations. Underlying this project are other feminist research assumptions: interrogating systems of power as social constructs and working toward representation and broader social change. For this project – and my participation in it as a researcher – feminist research has been vital to give space for people to be human, be vulnerable, and have feelings. In

the first section of this chapter, I go into further detail about the feminist research methods that I am building on for my own research methodology.

In this chapter, I use: 1) feminist methods and methodologies and connect to scholarship in 2) writing studies and 3) technical communication to study crisis communicative interactions. I also describe the context of my study, methods of data collection, and methods of data analysis, situating each as a part of this feminist research study. Finally, as a way to transition to my next chapter that will investigate and describe the writing practices and communicative interactions of teachers composing crisis messages during the initial COVID-19 impacted spring semester of 2020, I sketch out my own experiences during the initial shift to online teaching halfway through the Spring 2020 semester.

Building upon feminist research approaches

It is important for me to first establish the feminist grounding that I will be building upon in my own research methodology and methods as well as connecting to in my discussion of writing studies and TPC approaches to research. Philosopher of science Sandra Harding (1987) is a scholar I reference when defining some initial foundations for feminist methodologies. Harding states that "one distinctive feature of feminist research is that it generates its problematics from the perspective of women's experiences. It also uses these experiences as a significant indicator of the 'reality' against which hypotheses are tested" (p. 7). While this statement is more reliant on a limited gender binary, which is something that contemporary intersectional feminism is moving away from, it is one beginning towards my own feminist methodological stance toward research of and for marginalized groups. The majority of instructors included in my study identify as women, which aligns with ISU Writing Program and English department instructor demographics, so providing space for women to share their experiences is vital. Harding also

stresses the importance of the plural form of "women's experiences," reminding us that it is important to also understand that the experiences of women, like all people, are not universal but rather individual. In addition, individual experiences vary across different cultural categories that further complicate and can even contradict women's experiences (p. 7). Harding argues that the questions an oppressed group wants answered "are rarely requests for so-called pure truth. Instead, they are queries about how to change its conditions; how its world is shaped by forces beyond it; how to win over, defeat, or neutralize those forces arrayed against its emancipation, growth, or development" (p. 8). Harding's approach to feminist research greatly impacted how I approached my research questions for this project, considering not only the gender of participants but also other social identities and the institutional positionality of respondents as graduate student instructors who are contingent faculty.

More contemporary feminist research work in the fields of rhetoric and education also influences my feminist research practices and feminist methodology, such as Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch (2012) and Jennifer Espositio and Venus Evans-Winters (2022). Royster and Kirsch (2012) argue that "trends and practices in feminist rhetorical studies have broken through habitual expectations for rhetorical studies to be overwhelmingly about men and male-dominsated arenas, with the consequence of creating volatility in research and practice" (p. 17). Royster and Kirsch uphold the notion that there is value in recognizing and appreciating the lives, words, participation, leadership, and legacies of women, and that through critical, feminist research practices, we can have a better-informed, more inclusive conceptional space in rhetorical studies (p. 18). While their work doesn't always explicitly address composition, it is necessary to pull from these scholars because my research focuses on writing teachers who are women in a professional workplace.

Even more recently, in education research, Espositio and Evans-Winters (2022) bring a more inclusive intersectional feminist lens to qualitative research in ways that have informed my study. Intersectionality shifts conversations from singular identities to reveal how institutions, social structures, policies, and power relationships affect identities at intersections of marginalization or oppression (p. 16). Intersectionality turns researchers' attention to those trying to thrive in an unjust world, at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, religion, and other social and embodied identities, and asks us to pay attention to critical reflexivity (p. 17). Espositio and Evans-Winters argue that feminist theories and methodologies are interconnected with embodiment and argue that this connection can be valuable for research and learning (p. 27), a benefit to the production of knowledge rather than a deficit, aside, or occlusion. They maintain that theories and research that center the experiential lives of people are central to qualitative research projects (p. 33).

Esposito and Evans-Winters' work in education and qualitative research is timely and needed across all academic fields, including rhetoric and composition, that require us–still–to validate our work and our claims in front of research and institutional communities that believe we have socially motivated agendas or are too personally involved in our research. Yet, Esposito and Evans-Winters remind us that "our stories and our histories, our traumas, and our joys matter" (p. 35). In their articulation of narrative inquiry, Espositio and Evans-Winters maintain that it is important to recognize that both research participants and researchers themselves lead storied lives (p. 67-8). Relying on connections that feminist scholars make between the importance of identity and narrative to qualitative research, my study design relies on and centralizes the lived experiences of teachers who wrote and worked through a global pandemic,

their embodied experiences, their embodied identities, and their complex stories, histories, traumas, and successes.

In addition to these methodological perspectives on gender, intersectionality, and lived experience in qualitative research, others' feminist scholarship influenced my research methods of data collection and analysis as well, including Cynthia L. Selfe and Gail E. Hawisher (2012) and Catherine Kohler Riessman (2008). Selfe and Hawisher (2012) especially helped my understanding of feminist methods for conducting research interviews. A more traditional understanding of an interview would be characterized by careful planning, controlled sessions, and a researcher-dominated storyline. However, Selfe and Hawisher argue for more of a conversational interview method, one that is less formal and less predictable (p. 38). This method of interview makes it possible for participants to be more involved, making knowledge production a joint project of inquiry. As a method, feminist interviewing also allows for more storytelling and eliciting of narratives that otherwise would be suppressed by conventional interview methods that do not make space for participant-led stories that vary from researchers' questions or expectations. Making space for stories allows participants to make sense of their own experiences as well as helps to illustrate to the interviewer "unconscious acts of world making" (p. 39), which helps to lead participants toward less performative answers and more unpacking of their complex realities at the time. In my semi-structured interviews, I framed my questions to reflect the complexity of looking back and remembering. Some examples of the questions include: 1) Can you tell me a story or about an experience communicating with students who were struggling during COVID? 2) What do you remember about how students responded to your online messages during this semester? 3) Tell me a story about how it felt to be communicating with students online so suddenly as the only or primary way of being able to

communicate with them? I used Selfe and Hawisher's work not only in interview structure, but also in survey structure, extending their feminist approach to multiple research methods.

Sociologist Catherine Riessman (2008) also argues for narrative methods of data collection as a valuable feminist research method. She states that narrative accomplishes what other types of communication cannot because individuals and groups construct identities through storytelling, and narratives are strategic, functional, and purposeful (p. 8). The narrators of stories often use storytelling to argue their points and persuade their audiences (p. 9). The stories they tell help to shape the image that was their reality and to bring in the audience to see things from their perspective. Because storytelling most often pertains to events that happened in the past, individuals may turn to narrative storytelling to "excavate and reassess memories that may have been fragmented, chaotic, unbearable, and/or scarcely visible before narrating them" (p. 8). Relying on Riessman's framing of narrative interviews and the power of stories, I created space during my study interviews for participants to be able to do this kind of sense-making and meaning-making of a particularly challenging situation in March 2020 and far beyond.

In both my study methodology and methods, I rely on feminist research perspectives. I consider myself a feminist in life, as well as a feminist researcher in particular, so it's important to me that these values are explicit and apparent in the research project design explained throughout this chapter. My project values connection and conversation through story, whether that is in the connections made between teachers and students through communications or the conversations had between researcher and participants. Brené Brown (2010), a contemporary feminist researcher and storyteller who has a background in social work, advocates for this power of connection: "I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they

derive sustenance and strength from the relationship" (p. 39). In my approach to both methodology and methods in this project, I place significant value on connection and giving participants space to tell their stories without feeling judged, instead feeling that their stories were cherished and heard. Even if some of the scholars that I look to in this dissertation don't self-identify as feminist, in writing studies for example, they hold many of the same values of these feminist researchers whom I connect back to when I am thinking about doing qualitative research in the fields of writing studies and technical professional communication.

Writing studies as feminist approach to studying writing teachers' communicative interactions

In asking writing instructors about their practices of writing crisis messages as communicative interactions with students, I take a feminist approach that is also shaped by writing studies scholarship and scholars in TPC who also employ feminist approaches to study the ways that users are impacted and how they respond to and act with various kinds of crisis communications. In writing studies' scholarship of writing teacher research, scholars interact with teachers as writers, describe everyday writing experiences, study everyday teacher texts, and make everyday writing visible as an embodied activity (Sheppard, 2021; Reed, 2020; CWPA, 2020; Kirsch, 2003), and are often interested in observing teachers' embodied identities in the classroom as well as examining their teaching materials. While these scholars do not label themselves or their approaches to scholarship as feminist, someone that does explicit feminist work in writing studies is Rachel Gramer (2017) in her work on new teachers' identity learning. My own feminist writing studies methodology is more closely aligned with Gramer's methodology but is still influenced by scholars who are not explicitly feminist.

Andrea Olinger's work (2011; 2020; 2020) is not explicitly labeled feminist, but her research helped me think about how to conduct artifact-based interviews. Olinger often focuses on ethical and equitable sociocultural approaches to English education research. Specifically, in "Academic Literacies as Laminated Assemblage and Embodied Semiotic Becoming" (2019) she and Paul Prior identify power structures and systems by examining how faculty and students represent and enact academic writing styles across different contexts. They interview individuals to discuss how their writing is embodied, such as in registered gestural metaphor, actions, and affect, and in their literate activities. For example, they conduct a case study tracing a biologist's literacies from contexts at age three and at age thirty, gathering various artifacts of their writing from different time periods. Olinger and Prior argue for the emphasis on embodied experiences in the interview process, calling for more democratic and transparent research methodologies. As I designed and conducted my research, Olinger influenced how I thought about feminist interviewing. I value my participants' individual experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and the embodied writing that they did during a time of crisis and emotional upheaval. Therefore, in my interviews, I gave space for folks to be human, be vulnerable, and share their feelings with me. I also asked them to provide artifacts of their writing from this specific context and moment in time so that we can talk about their writing as well as look at it tangibly. This kind of feminist methodology ties back to the feminist methodology and teacher research that Gramer (2017) does in her work on teaching identity.

My research methodology and methods were also influenced by the research methods of Kevin Roozen by how he looks at writing artifacts and tracks the trajectory of writing development (2009; 2010; 2011). Roozen's work highlights the various discursive practices of people writing in situated rhetorical spaces with intersectional identities and histories. For

example, in his chapter "Mapping Translingual Literacies: Encouraging and Enacting Translingual Perspectives of Literate Life" (2020), Roozen traces one writer's use of language and multimodality across different kinds of writing artifacts: interacting in a Japanese video game, creating a wiki website, teaching herself Japanese, creating fanfiction and fanart, and illustrating a biology lab manual. Roozen wants to call attention to how students might be called monolingual but in reality are engaging in complex translingual literacies. He wants to make visible how students are informed by and contribute to this complex literate activity system and how they understand translingual communication as the norm, rather than the rare exception. Similar to Olinger, Roozen also does not self-identify as a feminist researcher or explicitly name his methods as feminist. However, both Roozen and Olinger do work to attend to the lived experience of their research participants, and both focus on the thoughtful use of open-ended, artifact-based interviews as a way to make visible complex communicative interactions. Roozen's work, in particular, influenced how I can center human-lived experience in my interviews and surveys to illustrate the complex activity system that writing teachers were engaging with during a time of crisis. He influenced how I traced the communicative interactions from writing teachers to students from the initial COVID-19-impacted semester to following pandemic-impacted semesters, illustrating how writing teachers learned how to communicate with their students in online spaces to align with their teaching goals and pedagogy.

The methods used by these writing studies scholars can be taken up as part of my feminist research practice, because their work centers lived experience and prioritizes the perspectives of participants regarding their literate activities. In this project, I rely on people's lived experiences with writing in my objects of analysis and create space to make others' otherwise occluded embodied writing experiences visible. I also see writing differences as a

productive norm and attempt to analyze without assuming there is a singular way to write crisis communication. Further, in analyzing responses, I attempted to not pass unnecessary judgment or evaluation, instead valuing generous reading of participants' shared stories about writing. Most important to me – after seeing how people responded about writing during crisis moments – was to offer people space to process, to feel, and to describe what happened to them. Throughout my dissertation research plan, my first priority was to offer a space to be vulnerable and human in order to move forward with agency and self-autonomy after enduring a collective traumatic event.

Technical and professional communication as feminist approach to investigating writing teachers' crisis communication messages

In this project, I also rely on feminist research approaches in TPC because my objects of analysis include written artifacts of crisis communication messages from writing instructors, and survey and interview responses about people's experiences writing in crisis situations. Not all TPC scholars identify as feminist researchers but many do identify as social justice TPC scholars (Agboka, 2013; Colton and Holmes, 2018; Walton, Moore, and Jones, 2019; Marsen, 2020). TPC emphasizes audience, investigating what expectations users have of a genre or a text and how people's needs are met through TPC (Jones, 2016; Agboka, 2013). In crisis communication work specifically, people need to be valued and supported through effective communication because of the atypical circumstances that produce an urgent, exigent need for successful communicative interaction (Marsen, 2020; Walton, Moore, Jones, 2019) . In this project I analyze crisis communication artifacts from writing instructors while considering the consequences to writing teachers as a complex audience, even within a single program. Many of my participants were graduate students at the time they participated in my study, contingent

labor within complex university systems, and untrained in crisis communication, all during a time of global and local crisis.

One key work taking up what I see as feminist research approaches in TPC is *Technical Communication After the Social Justice Turn: Building Coalitions for Action*, by Rebecca Walton, Kristen R. Moore, and Natasha N. Jones (2019). A goal of this work is to emphasize the importance of building coalitions as a way to create alliances to overcome oppression and create change. Once coalitions are established, they have the ability to create "practical strategies and tactics for getting this work done" (p. 133). Walton, Moore, and Jones establish a heuristic, the "4 Rs," that is a four-step process: recognize, reveal, reject, and replace. The "4Rs" include the ability to Recognize the injustices and our complicities in them, Reveal the systematic oppressions and initiate a call-to-action for change, Reject injustices and opportunities to perpetuate them, and Replace the oppressive practices with intersectional, coalition-led practices (p. 133). Any communicator can claim that they are engaging in feminist communication practices and in the interest of people who are oppressed or people who are undergoing traumatic periods, but that communicator might not be actively creating a coalition for real change or valuable support. This project attempts to illustrate how the 4Rs are integrated in writing teachers' communicative interactions with students and how they initiate calls for change. Building coalitions for action is a feminist methodological approach to doing interactive communicative work in the world. In this project, I will offer some insights into how we might work toward the goal of using online communicative interactions as an activity and tool for coalition-building between teachers and students by recognizing, revealing, rejecting, and replacing. While social justice research and feminist research are not interchangeable terms, they often align in ways that are important to me and relevant to my project. My project practices

feminist research methods, similar to TPC scholars, because I am collecting artifacts of crisis technical communication from writing teachers during the pandemic and interviewing those teachers about their technical writing practices, valuing the ways in which they recognize and reveal structural problems and inequities.

Framing communicative interactions as a feminist research approach

In this project, I see feminist research approaches in writing studies and TPC as aligned with my use of Julie A. Hengst's (2020) communicative interactions. In *Understanding Everyday Communicative Interactions,* Hengst focuses on: centering lived experience, prioritizing participants, seeing difference as a norm, and making visible the embodiment of communication. Hengst argues that communicative interactions are situated in sociocultural activities. In my project, I have taken up Hengst's work on communicative interaction to talk about educators communicating during times of crisis how these interactions take place in sociomaterial spaces, like the living rooms, bedrooms, and offices of teachers writing during lockdown. She looks at how information is delivered from one person to the other, and how the resources that people draw upon within communicative interactions are both embodied, like writing during a time of crisis and emotional trauma, and multimodal, like communicating across multiple platforms in use during the COVID-19 interrupted semester. Hengst's work also illuminates how literate activity systems of communication are defined–and can be changed–by power structures. Like Walton, Moore, and Jones, Hengst wants to recognize and reveal how communicative interactions are influenced by the sociocultural world. I take up the synthesis of Walton, Moore, and Jones and Hengst to analyze the effect of workplace norms that administrators attempt to uphold, even during global crises.

While Hengst does not explicitly identify as a feminist researcher, her research attempts to describe what is happening in communicative interactions without passing judgment or evaluating writers in unhelpful ways. As such, I see her framing of communicative interactions as aligned with feminist research practices in writing studies, in TPC, and in my project. For this project, I chose to use 'communicative interactions' rather than 'genre' when discussing the crisis messages that teachers sent to students because I believe it best describes what I am interested in analyzing. As described in Chapter 1, Hengst's 3 key principles for communicative interactions are: 1) They are always situated in sociocultural activities, 2) They draw on, and are shaped by, people's patterns of participation in sociomaterial spaces, and 3) Communicative resources are embodied and multimodal (p. 4). These principles are useful to my research project because I am studying the initial communicative interaction messages that teachers sent to students online. These messages are based in the sociocultural space of a writing classroom and are embodied practices that are shaped by both the teacher and the students.

Due to the temporal limitations of conducting a study 2 years after the COVID-19 crisis semesters, I do not have IRB-approved access to private communication from students from 2020. Instead, I focus on the teacher as the person who was institutionally responsible to be the initiator of teacher-student communicative interactions during the early days of COVID-19 and then later in 2022. Within the initiated teacher to student communications, I look at how teachers understand these communication experiences now and how they continue to exist within and shape those complex communicative interaction systems. I consider the artifacts that I collect as socioculturally active texts that start out with writing instructor choices but could be taken up by students in various ways. It is within the scope of my feminist research approach to look at how teacher-writers' communicative interactions can help students achieve learning and writing

goals, can shape teachers' pedagogical communication practices over time, and can create ephemeral moments of meaningful support for teachers as instructors and as human beings also going through crises.

Methods for studying writing teachers' initiated communicative interactions

Conducting study at ISU and reaching out to ISU writing instructors

I chose to conduct the qualitative research for my dissertation at my own institution, Illinois State University (ISU). ISU is the oldest public university in the state of Illinois and according to the US Department of Education, during the 2020-2021 semester, ISU had around 17,674 undergraduate students enrolled, along with 2,559 graduate students. ISU is a predominantly white institution (PWI) with over 70% of the student population being white. ISU is an R2 institution, meaning that it is a doctoral-granting university with high research activity. According to the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, ISU is also one of the largest producers of teachers in the US, making teaching a field that is valued and given attention. I chose to conduct my research at ISU because at this institution I am both a graduate student and writing instructor. Therefore, I have personal insight into how the university enacted stages of guidelines throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and I received communication messages from this institution chronicling this time period. I also have first-hand experience as a writing teacher at ISU, mitigating the changes in teaching and sending out crisis messages to students and working within this complex communicative interaction system during COVID-19.

When determining participants to recruit, I decided to ask those within the ISU Writing Program. I requested that the Writing Program Director, Dr. Rachel Gramer, send my recruitment emails to writing program specific email listservs: one for English 101 Composition as Critical Inquiry, ISU's only required general education writing course; and one for English

145 Writing in the Academic Disciplines, writing courses required for many majors primarily in the College of Arts and Sciences, and English 145A13 Writing Business and Government Organizations, a course required for many majors in the College of Business. With exceptions of a few tenured professors, the instructors who teach these writing courses are Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and non-tenure track faculty, called Instructional Assistant Professors (IAPs) at ISU. Typically there are around sixty instructors teaching writing each year. While some instructors receiving the survey recruitment email did not teach during the Spring 2020 semester, many of them did and could speak to their individual experiences. The folks receiving these recruitment emails might have already been familiar with me as a fellow writing program instructor who began teaching at ISU in 2018, or they might know me from my time working on the Writing Program Leadership Team (WPLT) as the New Instructor Mentor and the ENG 145 Instructor Mentor and Outreach Coordinator. I have taught both ENG 101 and ENG 145 in previous semesters, so I am familiar with these two classes. I am also knowledgeable about ISU's Writing Program and how it values writing and genre research.

Data collection methods for studying communicative interactions

The survey consisted of 16 questions and took about 30 minutes to complete. I asked participants questions about their communicative interactions and teaching and writing experiences during the Spring 2020 semester, the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the initial move to online teaching mid-semester, and I asked them about their experience in later COVID-impacted semesters. I also asked participants to provide artifact examples of online messages that they sent to students: one sent during the Spring 2020 semester and one from a subsequent semester.

To protect participants' privacy, the survey was anonymous. I asked respondents to remove all identifying information from artifacts they submitted. However, based on their responses, it may have been possible to identify them. That is why it was also important for me to tell participants that their participation was entirely voluntary with no expectation from me that people would or had to participate even if I knew them as a fellow writing instructor, as a fellow graduate student, or as a previous member of the WPLT. In my recruitment email, I also stated that respondents may decide not to answer certain questions or stop the survey at any time. While I previously held administrative positions on the WPLT, I explicitly declared that I was no longer in those positions and would be protecting people's privacy and confidentiality even in my conversations with my dissertation director, Dr. Rachel Gramer, who was the Writing Program Director during the entirety of my dissertation research and writing. Dr. Gramer did not have access to my data and, as a feminist administrator, had no intention of or interest in pursuing any potentially identifying information for any reason given the circumstances and the timing of the written artifacts from previous semesters. The survey was sent out to the 2 ISU Writing Program Listservs, making my data collection sample a convenience sample. The survey was sent out 3 times over the span of 4 months in 2022 to prompt and remind folks to participate. In total, there were 20 responses to the survey, out of roughly 60 available writing teachers, and 40 artifacts collected. In addition, I took my own survey and submitted two of my own artifacts.

I also chose interview participants through a convenience sample, asking writing instructors that I knew might be interested in talking about this particular activity and time. I began teaching writing at ISU in 2018, and I am familiar with many writing program instructors from interacting with them in graduate courses, professional development sessions, graduate student cohorts, office space proximity, etc. I constructed a list of writing program instructors

who I knew taught writing courses during the Spring 2020 semester that I was comfortable reaching out to and who might be comfortable speaking with me. I reached out to that list of writing instructors to see if they would be interested in being an interview research participant. In total, I conducted 10 interviews during the Fall semester of 2022.

I protected interview participants' privacy by using pseudonyms when discussing or quoting from their responses in my dissertation writing. When we discussed their communicative interaction artifacts, they did not share any identifying information. I did not share or present any of the video or audio recordings in my dissertation project, as they are talking about their employment and it could impact their future employability, however unlikely. I protected the participants' confidentiality by not sharing their responses with others, such as my colleagues or friends, and I also did not share raw data with Dr. Gramer, the Writing Program Director, who is also my dissertation director. The interview consisted of 24 questions and took between 60 to 90 minutes to complete. Some questions asked them specifically about the 2 artifacts that they submitted with their survey response. Olinger and Roozen both influenced my methods for interviewing in looking at specific artifacts of writing as well as talking about writing more generally. Aligning with how I conducted my survey, I did not offer compensation for taking part in the interview portion of my research project. However, at the end of my interviews, I offered to help each participant in whichever ways they might need in the future, such as participating in their own research projects, providing feedback on writing, collaborating on projects, sharing teaching materials, etc. This is what I offered participants as reciprocity for their time and sharing their written artifacts, their stories from a traumatic time, and their vulnerability as humans.

As with all research projects, there are limitations to this study. Because this study was conducted at only one institution, the results of the study are particular to its location. In keeping with the demographics at many PWIs in the US and in the Midwest in particular, the majority of participants were white and female-identifying, talking about teaching predominantly white students. Because all participants teach at ISU, they have similar starting points of experiencing how one institution conducted each COVID-19 impacted semester. It would be compelling to investigate how writing instructors' communication practices looked at institutions with varying risk mitigation situations. Instead, I recruited in the WP at ISU, which does have a higher percentage of transnational GAs than many English graduate programs; and we teach the most diverse populations afforded us at ISU because we teach a general education writing course to students across campus. Lastly, looking at a relatively small sample size, I really am only looking at a snapshot of how some instructors navigated writing to students in crisis, and it is not representative of the whole program, other teachers at ISU, or those at other institutions. However, this snapshot has given me compelling and thought-provoking data to begin to describe some of the communicative interactions and patterns of participation in writing teachers writing to students. I express and outline what the relationship was like between some writing instructors and students during this time of crisis and how writing instructors used writing for pedagogical purposes. I show what we can learn from some teachers' writing during and since Spring 2020 in ways that are still valuable to unpack in the fields of writing studies, TPC, and writing teacher education.

As with many research projects, data collection does not always go as planned or as expected. Due to technical difficulties, I lost 8 out of the 10 interview audio recordings. As there was no way to retrieve the files, I had to salvage some of the valuable responses that I received

from my interviews in an alternative way. I did not want to ask for additional synchronous time from interview participants, having to sit down and do the entire interview over again. Instead, I composed an interview questionnaire with selected questions from my original interview questions. After completing all the interviews previously, I had an understanding of which questions participants seemed most engaged in and responded to the most robustly. I could see which questions elicited the most in-depth responses aligned with my – and participants'– memories of our initial interview. I asked participants to help me piece together some of our initial interviews. I gave them two options: an interview questionnaire or a "mini-interview." Both options contained the same set of pre-selected questions, but participants could choose to deliver their responses written or orally. I told participants that they were welcome to skip questions if they wanted to and told them separately, outside of the formal email request, to try their best to remember and if they did not, that was okay, too.

Each of my 8 interview participants with lost interview audio files responded to the interview questionnaire, for which I was grateful and appreciative. This situation led then to an additional limitation to my study of including data from written-out responses to questions that were based on memory: memories of our initial interview, different memories and stories than they might have previously shared, and perhaps shorter responses to questions than they initially gave, given the additional time required of them. However, the responses still shared valuable insight into how writing teachers wrote, participated, and felt during pandemic-affected semesters. This study still shares the responses and discussion of the 2 artifacts from those 8 participants in ways that rely on their embodied experiences of a traumatic time in a constantly changing workplace and their particular memories of their patterns of participation with writing to students during that time. In other words, participants may have shared different memories in

the questionnaire than in the interview, but they are still valuable memories of experience.

Methods of data analysis

For this dissertation project, I had three areas of my research that I needed to analyze: interview transcripts, questionnaire responses, and survey responses. I also had 2 artifact data sets from survey participants: 1 message sent during the Spring 2020 semester and 1 message sent during the Fall 2020, Spring 2021, or Fall 2021 semester. I decided to code for the same 7 tags across all three areas of research because in all of my data I am looking for similar characteristics. I created my tags by looking to research questions. I wanted to know how instructors composed crisis messages to students, what tools they used to write these messages, and what people or structures of support affected their message writing. I wanted to know about the affective responses of instructors writing messages to students during a global pandemic. How did the context of COVID-19 change how writing teachers thought about their teaching? How did it influence their pedagogical goals in writing messages to students? I wanted to know how writing crisis messages affected their writing identities as teachers. Based on these research questions I was asking of my data, I did my initial coding with 7 tags: tools, teaching goals, writing practices, identity, learning, people or structures of support, and emotions. I used the software program Taguette to code my data. I chose this program because it was free, simple, and easy for me to use. It was important to look at the tagged data from different sources separately, as well as together, to mark any patterns that I saw across data sets. It was also important for me to see what tags were often talked about in conjunction in participants' answers to different questions.

I created these tags to align with writing studies as a methodology. I was looking to unpack writing practices and look at tools and writing goals, with attempts to understand how

writing practices are related to identities as we perceive and enact them. One of my initial tags was to look for some of the "tools" that instructors used when communicating with students. I wanted to see if there was a change in communication tool from before, during, or after the COVID-impacted semesters. I was also curious to know whether or not these tools were used in correlation to pedagogical practices that could have shifted from semester to semester. I then wanted to tag for "teaching goals," to describe how teaching goals changed throughout the semesters and how those goals were connected to how teachers were communicating with students. I also tagged for "identity" as I wanted to describe how teachers saw themselves as students, family-members, humans, etc. during the pandemic and how that identity was connected to or informed by their teaching identity.

In addition, I wanted to describe how folks learned how to communicate in online spaces with students, both during and since. This is aligned with writing studies methodology and a sociocultural approach to understanding teaching and learning. I did not want to only describe in-depth what was happening and who they were when it was happening, but also how teachers were learning and perceiving that learning in relation to particular people and structures. How did that "learning about writing" crisis messages impact how they initiated communicative interactions with students? I established the tag "people or structures of support" based on the number of participants' responses that mentioned the folks outside of themselves and students who affected their writing processes. How did those people, such as friends, strangers on the internet, colleagues, family members, mentors, and administrators, shape how teachers constructed online messages to students? And how did people affect teachers' pedagogical goals during the pandemic? I was also interested in the actual "writing practices" that teachers were engaging in while constructing messages and the actual rhetorical choices that they made when

writing messages to students. Finally, I wanted to tag my research data for "emotions" because of how interwoven the emotions were when writing teachers discussed how they wrote and thought about teaching during a global crisis. Teaching during the pandemic was a collective traumatic event that was undeniably emotional for everyone – teachers, students, college administrators, college staff, humans. It would be impossible to separate in the communicative interaction activity system how teachers communicated during a crisis, from their own emotional and embodied experience as well as from the emotional and embodied experiences of the students that they were sending to and receiving messages from.

I used the 7 tags to analyze the interview transcripts, questionnaire responses, and survey responses as well as the 2 different artifacts that I collected from participants. In Chapter 3, I analyze the artifacts from Spring 2020 and the data from the interview transcripts, questionnaire results, and survey results that was relevant to the initial COVID-impacted semester. In Chapter 4, I analyze the artifacts of messages from a subsequent semester and the data that corresponds with writing messages to students moving forward. Through all of the various methods of data collection, I incorporated my grounding in feminist research methods. My data centered around the lived experiences of teachers who were sharing their stories of communicating online during a crisis and in the subsequent semesters. The narrative inquiry that I am conducting through these research methods helped to recognize and appreciate the embodied individual experiences and reality that are affected by socio-cultural impacts, such as power structures, and help to value intersectional teaching identities.

The Spring 2020 semester: My own experience

Before moving on to my next chapter, "Teachers Learning to Compose Crisis Communication Emails to Students," I would like to position myself and my own experiences

during the move to online teaching during the Spring 2020 semester. I want to make transparent the origin story of my research project and why the research questions that I ask in this project matter to real people's lived experiences of being teacher-writers during times of crisis and beyond.

I was still in course work as a graduate student during the spring of 2020. One of the classes that I was taking was a risk and crisis technical communication course. Little did I know at the time when I signed up for this course, it would soon become one of the most relevant classes that I would ever take as a student. What made this class even more uncanny (and even almost ironic) was the fact that we were discussing, examining, and analyzing TPC texts all through the lens of an entertaining theme: the zombie apocalypse. Before leaving for spring break mid-March, our class was discussing a new illness that was spreading quickly around the globe. At the time, we mostly called it the coronavirus. I mused that this might be an interesting "real world" topic that we could talk about in this class that was all about communicating during crisis situations. I had no idea just how pertinent my musing would be in the coming months.

For spring break, I decided to go visit my family and friends in my hometown. It seemed like the discussion of COVID-19 increased each day over break as there seemed to be new information and updates being delivered to our smartphones every few hours. It wasn't until the Illinois State Governor, JB Pritzker, announced that the state would be going into a lockdown to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 that things began to feel deeply serious and monumentous. Not long after the announcement, I received an email from ISU's president, Larry Dietz, that we would not be returning to campus after spring break. Instead, we would transition to teaching online until at least mid-April. For me, it was at that moment when my emotional state went from "calm and serious" to "freaked out and scared." I was anxious not only because we were

living in a terrifying international health situation but because I was suddenly being asked to teach online–something that I had never done previously. As instructors, we were given a week to make this transition before online education began. Even though I was currently taking a class on crisis communication, I felt far from prepared or ready to start composing crisis messages to students. I was worried about making my messages 'perfect' or 'successful' – I wanted to support students as vulnerable humans to the best of my ability as their instructor as well as help them to practice writing and learn about writing practices.

Looking back, it is this initial response to having to initiate communicative interactions with students during a crisis that led to my initial research questions: How did instructors learn how to compose crisis communication messages to students? What tools did they use to do so? And what people and structures of support affected how they composed crisis messages? At the time, I reached out to many of my fellow writing instructors, many of whom I also considered my friends, and asked them 3 questions: 1) How were they planning on making this transition to online teaching? 2) How were they planning on writing to students, and what were these messages going to be about? 3) Were they feeling as distressed and as frantic as I was? My colleagues all had varying thoughts and opinions on how best to make the transition to online teaching and how best to talk about this transition with students. There were copious online articles, tweets, teaching resources, and memes that were getting passed around in group chats and on social media about how we can push forward and teach during a pandemic. We were all in crisis-mode, taking on a new role as professional crisis communicators in our interactions with students. How did we learn how to construct these messages? Were we prepared to take on this new role? What people or structures of power did we rely on, just as students were relying on us?

My colleagues' answers to my third question were unanimous: yes–we are all worried

about what is going on, both in the world and in our teaching. This line of questioning then fed into the creation of my second set of research questions: What were some of the affective responses of writing instructors when composing messages to students during the pandemic? How did we feel to be crisis technical communicators? Talking about writing and communicating in a crisis when not actively in a crisis situation is one thing, and the panic-inducing actuality of composing and sending messages during an actual crisis is another. We were writing in a communicative interaction system of a collective-traumatic event, one that would inevitably change the way that we wrote and taught. This thought influenced additional research questions: How did pandemic communication affect how writing instructors conducted classes, thought about their teaching, or influenced their pedagogical goals? How did this crisis situation change us as writers, and also how did it change us as teachers?

In the communicative interaction system of writing during the initial COVID-19 impacted Spring 2020 semester and in subsequent semesters, our identities as teacher-writers must have been altered. The ways in which we thought about communication with students had been framed in a totally new context that was unfamiliar to us. As we moved through mitigating pandemic-affected semesters, online and in the classroom, other research questions began to take shape: How do teachers use online communication in ways that align with their teaching identities and writing course goals? With a nod towards the future, how did writing in a crisis context affect how we would treat communicative interactions with students in the future? These are some of the questions that I was thinking about in relation to myself as a teacher-writer during the pandemic as well as questions I was thinking about in relation to my peers. The impetus for my dissertation project was wanting to know the answers to these questions and determining what we can learn and take away from this world-altering experience. I knew that I

wanted to conduct this research ethically and responsibly, and the answer to how to do that was through employing feminist research methods in writing studies and technical and professional communication. I want to highlight the real, lived experience of writing teachers, such as myself, value their differences in writing (and teaching) practices, and illuminate how teacher-writers are working towards change for students.

CHAPTER III: COMMUNICATING IN A CRISIS: COMMUNICATIVE INTERACTIONS DURING SPRING 2020

In my initial data analysis chapter, I focus on how instructors communicated in the spring of 2020 – the first pandemic-affected semester. Aligned with my feminist research methods, I took my own data collection survey. Part of the survey asked participants to select one message artifact that they sent students during the Spring 2020 semester. I selected two messages for the survey, both of which I will share here. This first message (Figure 1) was an announcement that I sent students during ISU's spring break, not long after the announcement from former ISU President Dr. Larry Dietz had gone out to all students, faculty, and staff, stating that we would be moving to all online learning after a one-week extended spring break. Before I re-read this message two years removed from when I initially sent it, I reflected on what I thought the message might contain and what exactly I said to my students in this initial crisis technical writing message. I thought that it would be a long announcement, full of lots of encouraging words of empathy and support as well as clear information about the technical side of how this class was going to be conducted moving forward. Looking at the message now, I was somewhat correct in my memory. The message was sent on March 12th, 2020:

Hello, All,

As you are probably well aware, Spring Break has been extended an additional week and we will be moving to online instruction on March 23rd and it will go through April 12th (this is the university's tentative end-date that is subject to change). Therefore, we will not be meeting in person for about a month.

For now, assume that everything is pushed back a week. Therefore, the investigative podcast, transcript, and uptake submission notes will be due on **Thursday, April 2nd**, and not on March 26th.

I will be working on creating a new schedule for the rest of Unit 2 and the beginning of Unit 3. You will receive another announcement early next week with these additional materials.

I will also be sending out a survey asking you what kinds of technology that you have access to at home (whether that is in BloNo or somewhere else). This class is about to get much more multimodal, so get ready for that! The schedule that I will be sending out will have additional details about how attendance, SLDs, and other in-class activities will occur in an online setting.

As always, if you have any comments, questions, or concerns about this transition, I am available by email. I am also willing to take phone calls or Skype calls as an additional long-distance communication method.

Stay calm, wash your hands, and we'll talk again soon.

All the best,

Prof. Capan

Figure 1 – Capan Email Message Artifact from March 12th, 2020

This message was not nearly as long as I remembered it being. I was also surprised at how calm and confident my tone was in this initial message. As I described in the previous chapter, I was anything but calm and I was not confident in how I was going to manage taking this class online. I was also anxious about how the world in general was going to be affected by the global pandemic. I also forgot that at the beginning of the switch to online learning, we thought that we would be returning to in-person classes in a month. Obviously, this did not occur and I would not see any students in-person for the rest of 2020. Looking back at this message, I was happy to see that I was offering to support my students, though surprised that I was offering

to take phone calls from students. From talking with my fellow colleagues, I took the idea of sending out a survey to my students to see what kinds of technology they were going to have access to at home. I was also surprised to see that I only moved their projects back one week, instead of softening the due date even further due to the circumstances. As I describe in the following sections, many instructors such as myself wanted to keep a sense of "togetherness" in their messages to students and still include clear expectations of the course projects.

This next message (Figure 2) was sent one week later, on March 19th, 2020:

Hello, Everyone!

As always, I hope that you are doing well during this difficult time. As we are approaching our "return" to classes, I wanted to send out a welcome message to everyone with the intention of keeping everyone on the same page.

Please watch this welcome message from me (there is a chance to get bonus points if you watch closely enough!): {YouTube link redacted}

Also, my friend and colleague Laurel Krapivkin put together this Google Doc with links to resources for students who have questions about housing, food, physical and mental health, etc. {Google Docs link redacted}

I have also posted our revised Unit 2 Schedule V4 under Resources -> Unit 2. I have also posted a screen-recorded video with voiceover walking you through the document: {YouTube link redacted}

As always, if you have any questions, comments, or concerns, you can reach me at:

Email: ecapan@ilstu.edu

Skype: Emily Capan

Zoom: ecapan@ilstu.edu

All the best,

Prof. Capan

Figure 2 – Capan Email Message Artifact from March 19th, 2020

When I looked back at this message, I was surprised to find my Skype information. At the time, I had no idea that Zoom would reign as the top live-video platform, as the lasting

popularity of Zoom did not become apparent until a few weeks later. In this particular message, I am clear about my intentions: I want to make sure that everyone is on the same page. The importance of "clarity" comes up often in my data results, as analyzed in this chapter. I also forgot that I started my YouTube teaching series right away – I posted weekly videos for my students that included updates and discussions of weekly topics. I found my video series to be so useful for my students that I continued it for three additional semesters. I also forgot that I screen recorded a walkthrough of our revised course schedule. This idea came from another one of my colleagues as a way to provide additional clarity for my students. I was also happy to see that I provided an additional living document link for students to find support outside of me and this class. Yet again, I was surprised to find that I did not include more words of positive affirmation and support. Similar to my first message, I wanted to appear to students as a leader that was calm and was ready to take on this new way of learning, and not the emotional and distressed person that was behind the screen, scrambling to figure out how to best teach my students in a crisis.

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the data I collected, organized into four sections that ask four key questions:

1. What do writing instructors value in communicative interaction?
2. How did writing teachers learn to communicate with students in Spring 2020?
3. What do artifacts of crisis messages sent during the Spring 2020 semester describe about communicative interaction?
4. What was the emotional labor of communicating with students during crisis?

In each of these sections, I am analyzing data from the survey results, artifacts collected in the survey, the interview transcripts, and the interview questionnaire. As I described in the previous chapter, I coded my data with seven tags: tools, teaching goals, writing practices, identity,

learning, people or structures of support, and emotions. Each of my research questions were answerable, in part, based on the data sets I collected and analyzed. As I will discuss in each section, some tags ended up proving more constructive and valuable to my overall research.

What do writing instructors value in communicative interaction?

One of my primary research goals for this project is to answer the question: How do teachers use online communication in ways that align with their teaching identities and writing course goals? In my dissertation, I am looking at one side of the communicative interaction - from instructor to student - which is the initiation text in the communicative interaction. Participants submitted survey results anonymously, so I will be referring to survey participants not by name but only as "participant." In addition, because I did not ask for gender demographics in the survey, I will refer to all survey participants with the singular 'they' pronoun. When I bring in data from my interview transcripts or from the interview questionnaires, I will use pseudonyms in place of their real names.

I asked survey participants to describe what they value about communication with students in general. The vast majority of participants talked exclusively about their side of the communicative interaction, which is the focus of my study. A concept that was mentioned across survey results as a top value and priority for instructors was "clarity." Instructors had slightly varying definitions of clarity as well as varying descriptions as to why clarity was important to them. For example, one participant described clarity as: "Taking advantage of the benefits of digital messaging to chunk content and support diverse ways of processing information." Two participants mentioned that for them, being clear meant that their messages are short and include actionable items, arguing that they don't want students to feel "lost" in the message. One

participant described how they value clarity in two different ways. They want students to have the "ability to discern information on the page (the technical aspect of how I compose the text) and their ability to understand that information" - stating that they want students to understand their messages "visibly" as well as have them be "comprehensible." Crises, as Sky Marsen (2020) argues, are "complex and multifaceted phenomenon and crisis communication research emphasizes different aspects and uses diverse methods to analyze them" (p. 164). In technical writing, and even more specifically in crisis technical communication, prioritizing a clear message that is understandable and digestible for the audience is paramount (Walaski 2011). Most participants are not TPC graduate students and would not use the term "technical writer" to describe themselves or the work that they do. However, participants' value of clarity aligns with the values of technical writers. For participants, their teaching goals and writing goals often overlap and work in service of each other, even if the crossover is not one that teachers are actively thinking about while communicating with students.

In addition to what teachers value about the clarity of their teaching-writing practices, many instructors also use descriptors of how they want to be perceived and how they want students to feel in relation to them. Multiple instructors stated that they value honesty, and they want to include that sentiment of authenticity in their messages. However, one survey participant put a qualifier on what they meant by being honest in their communication: "This doesn't mean sharing EVERYTHING with them, but at the same time, allowing them to see professors as not arbitrators of knowledge, taste, or whatever, but rather as people who are trying like them." In that same vein, many participants indicated that in their communication with students, they want to relate to students and they want students to feel heard and supported. Some specific words that participants used to describe what kind of communication they wanted to emulate in their

messages were: human, understanding, gracious, caring, empathetic, accommodating, encouraging, connection, consistency, safe, compassionate, and approachable. Participants commented that they want it to be clear through their messages that they see them as "people first, students second" and as "individual human beings with lives (and obligations, pursuits, and worries)."

In an attempt to relate to students and to offer themselves as resources for support and understanding, instructors demonstrated an equitable approach to technical writing when they communicated with students. Contemporary TPC approaches have roots in humanism, feminism, and cultural studies and moves away from the thought that TPC is neutral and objective (Agboka, 2013; Colton and Holmes, 2018; Walton, Moore, and Jones, 2019; Marsen, 2020). Social justice TPC seeks to dismantle systems that perpetuate injustice while also taking action to provide justice for marginalized/minoritized communities. Feminist TPC focuses on gender and power, seeking to balance unequal power through technical documentation. The subfields of feminist TPC and social justice should not be conflated, as they are ultimately not the same; however, scholarship from both fields helps to inform my perspectives on what writing teachers were doing while writing online messages and engaging in online communicative interactions with students particularly during a time of crisis.

Specifically, Natasha N. Jones (2016) incorporates social justice approaches to how she views the field of TPC as a "grassroots way for integrating considerations of diversity (a focus on the inclusion of varied perspectives and viewpoints) and social justice (critical reflection and action that promotes agency for the marginalized and disempowered)" (p. 343). Social justice TPC scholars deconstruct and dismantle hegemonic ideologies in order to remove oppressive systems of power and shift the focus of TPC to real human experience (p. 346). Social justice

TPC focuses on improving the human experience for those not in positions of power – like first-year college students in required writing classes, many of whom are first generation college students and multiply marginalized folks who were displaced from campus housing and unexpectedly returned home to places where they did not have dedicated space, time free from sudden family responsibilities, and in some cases safe shelter to return to.

From analyzing the data from survey respondents, I argue that instructors were following Walton, Moore, and Jones's (2019) heuristic of the 4Rs: recognize, reveal, reject, and replace. Instructors were attempting to recognize the power dynamics in the academy and in the classroom, revealing various inequalities for both students and themselves, especially during the initial COVID-19 crisis and interruption. Instructors in this study wanted to deconstruct and reject ideas of teachers as oppressive figures in a power dynamic. Instead, their aim was to make it clear to students that they wanted to replace this idea with one of equity and assistance. Instructors were attempting to establish a coalition with students to have successful communicative interaction practices. While instructors are doing this technical writing work without stating that was their intention in their responses to survey questions, it is evident in their answers that they recognized their own positions of power even as they were experiencing the same COVID-19 crisis and were concurrent members of the ISU university system. Instructors often want to make things better by being more equitable for all students, particularly multiply marginalized students. However, it can feel difficult to be explicit about the systems causing the inequities because of how we're conditioned and also because of how we feel bound within the system ourselves. The writing instructors that I interviewed, specifically, were all also graduate students. While they had power relative to students, they did not have much power relative to the university. It is important to note that the graduate instructors were in an in-between power

space, which likely created a level of empathy and understanding to accompany their feelings of responsibility to perform many kinds of repair work in the situation.

Similar to the values of support mentioned above, teachers want to communicate feelings of kindness and love because they value them as dispositional teaching principles. One participant who agreed with this sentiment stated that how students feel when reading their messages is more important than the actual content. She quoted Maya Angelou's famous adage that "people will forget what you tell them but they will never forget how you made them feel." Another participant commented that "it is better to be kind than to be right" and that "the power is in cooperation and supporting each other, that doing kind deeds is more important than pursuing some selfish goals at the expense of others." Another participant described that they want students to always know that they are there to support them and that they care about them: "Love is and should be at the core of all communication between students and teachers: love in the sense that they know I love teaching, I love my students, and they feel it through my communication and through the climate that I create in the classroom." Another participant commented on what they value now about communication with students after COVID-19 – they understand that feeling safe is a prerequisite to learning: "Until they feel safe, it is unreasonable for me to expect them to be able to focus on what I am asking of them." Through the rejection of narratives that teachers are non-human or uncaring, these instructors want to make it clear to their students that they do care about them and they want them to feel safe so that they can build a coalition of support together in their course.

I want to acknowledge the gendered nature of expectations of kindness and love from women, especially because almost all of my participants identify as women. The women are teaching in a cultural-historical activity system that is taking place in a patriarchal culture that

expects women to emotionally support and care for everyone else, all of the time, regardless of their own emotional states. However, as a feminist researcher, it is also important for me to listen to the teachers for whom such dispositions matter. Kindness and love should not be required of women or teachers, but when people value them, we want to recognize them. I also want to recognize that valuing kindness and love does not automatically replace other historical narratives of teachers as strict, uncaring authority figures who uphold hegemonic ideologies. Through their online messages to students that value kindness and love, instructors worked to build and laid the necessary groundwork to create the supportive coalitions that Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) argue for, with students. Being kind and being supportive of students' emotional needs can help build community and does not mean that people are only participating in the patriarchal expectations of women.

Feminist TPC scholarship on ethics of care can help explain some of the gendered labor expectations of writing teachers. Amber Lancaster (2018) describes how ethics of care can help specifically in risk communication. She explains that an ethic of care is especially needed in risk TPC because "in risky environments where miscommunication or mishaps can lead to injuries and fatalities, the bonding relationships between workers are crucial to everyone's safety" (p. 253). While the messages that writing teachers are composing to students may not lead to fatalities, they could lead to emotional damage, particularly during times of crisis that many experienced as traumatic and life-altering. It is important for TPC writers to prioritize care for others and relationships between people in their writing and make care central to decision making (p. 253). This is true for writing instructors participating in online communicative interactions with students as well. Emma Hutchinson (2021) describes specifically how ethics of care was a necessity for emergency e-learning during Spring 2020. Hutchinson describes, like

many of this study's survey participants, how the sudden change to online teaching was difficult and states that one of the biggest lessons that she learned was the importance of written communication to students. Within her written communication, she incorporated an ethic of care by "being explicit and upfront about structural challenges and including self-reflection as part of the learning process. We collectively discussed our privileges, our limits, and our disadvantages" (p. 186). Hutchinson said that her identity in the classroom space shifted from "less of an instructor [to] more [of] a fellow learner whose key task was to set up a safe, collective online space" (p. 186). Through the inclusion of an ethic of care in her writing to students during Spring 2020, Hutchinson was able to foster a learning environment that was inclusive and self-reflective, which is helpful not only in times of crisis but in any teaching context.

When answering the survey question about what the instructors value about communication with students, most participants did not comment on what they value from the student side of the communicative interaction. However, one instructor did comment specifically about what they want from students in online communicative interactions. They stated, "From the student side, I just value that a communication attempt is made. I want students to reach out when things are going on and let me know how I can help (even if they don't tell me exactly what is going on, just how I can help)." Despite that I had no questions that specifically asked about teachers' communicative expectations of students, it's telling that so many of the participants are concerned primarily about setting goals only for their side of the communicative interaction of online communication. In a future research study, it would be enlightening to ask instructors specifically about their expectations and objectives of student responses to communicative interaction in particular situations. The participants do comment on how they hope their audience *feels* when reading their message, which is important for feminist technical

communication, but they do not articulate any goals or actionable items for the students who are also participating in this communicative interaction and in the activity system of the class during a time of crisis.

How did writing teachers learn to communicate with students in Spring 2020?

In my research analysis, I investigated data that helped to answer my primary research question: How did instructors learn how to compose crisis communication messages to students? In both the survey and interview questions, I asked writing teachers about how they learned to participate in communicative interactions with students in online spaces during the pandemic. Some of those questions specifically pertained to the transition to online-only teaching that occurred during the Spring of 2020 about how they learned to communicate with students relying exclusively on asynchronous online messaging in a way that they might not have previously and how they learned to communicate with students during early days of the COVID-19 crisis.

Instructors indicated that they were scrambling to establish online-only communication goals and were not confidently prepared to take on this change in crisis. Looking at the data from the interviews and the survey results, much of what the writing instructors shared would be aligned with Meredith Reed's framing of teaching work as bricolage (2020): a triage situation where teachers were scrambling to find the resources that were at their disposal to make a difficult transition. Reed describes how bricolage is an apt theory to use for teachers and administrators because "composition professionals creatively make new and make do within limited contexts. In many ways, the act of teaching is an act of writing: an act of composing and remixing. Both writing and teaching involve repeated practice, revision, and reflection" (p. 108-9). Miles A. Kimball (2009) describes bricolage as part of what he coined tactical technical communication and defines it as "the practice of putting things together that were not

strategically intended to go together" (p. 3). This definition of bricolage comes from De Certeau (1984) but Kimball adds to this definition, stating that "radical sharing" is a newer, important part of bricolage (p. 4). Thanks to online communication tools and practices, people can now effectively share tactics with people all over the world. In my study, writing teachers during the emergency shift to online learning were able to reach people in situations similar to theirs and share their teaching approaches and techniques, whether with people at the same institution or all over the world.

Instructors who responded to my survey were heavily relying on their antecedent knowledge of online learning and online communication when they first began to take their in-person writing classroom into an online-only environment. When I asked survey participants about their background with online teaching, only one participant discussed how they had taught an online class in the past and how that experience was very helpful to them. Almost all of the participants expressed that they learned how to communicate online with students based on different kinds of past experiences. Specifically, two writing teachers indicated that they had communicated with others in online spaces at previous jobs in different work environments. The majority of survey participants also expressed that they relied on the tools of communication that they already had experience with, such as ISU's online learning management system and Microsoft Outlook. Ten of the survey participants said that they took what they knew about online communication from being a student and then applied knowledge to how they conducted themselves online as writing instructors. The reliance on antecedent knowledge is incorporated into Reed's explanation of academic bricolage – relying on what you already know to create a plan for moving forward.

Writing teachers also learned how to interact with students in the asynchronous, online communicative interaction by simply doing, which folks had varying levels of comfort with. Teachers were making decisions based on divergent uptake, which the ISU Writing Program describes as, "a way to see and understand that everyone's uptake is highly individuated, different from other people's uptake of the same idea, term, or practice…we want to be clear that divergence is a norm, that our making sense of new things is necessarily different from other people's because we each have different past experiences that shape how we understand ourselves and others in the world." Daisy had been teaching in the writing program at ISU for 4.5 years before the initial COVID-19 outbreak during Spring 2020. During the interview, Daisy remarked that the adjustment was a stressful process for her and she felt very overwhelmed during the initial transition to online learning. Part of this feeling of being overwhelmed was from the bombardment of information that was being thrown at her. She stated that she was getting so many emails and "everyone" on social media was sharing resources and tips for online teaching. However, Daisy's main concern was trying to figure out what "would best work for the kind of teacher/person I was," because she had more than 4 years of teaching experience and had created a previous teaching identity and a set of personal pedagogical values. Daisy wanted to figure out what was going to be best for her and for students first and then enact those practices. Another teacher Bella had been teaching at ISU for the same amount of time as Daisy. During her interview, Bella also expressed how she used email templates that she found through Facebook teaching groups to help her start her online communication process with students. The feminist ethics of care in TPC writing and teaching helps us to recognize what to keep and what must be adapted in a crisis – and in fact replaces any notions we might cling to that our teaching identities and practices are static and should not be adapted to external conditions.

In a different form of divergent uptake, Tessa decided to jump into the communicative interaction and start doing things to figure out how to best support students in online spaces, including eliciting student feedback. Tessa had a few years of college teaching experience and a few years of high school teaching experience, and she described her experience with learning how to communicate during this first COVID-impacted semester as mostly "trial by fire." Tessa "just started doing things and hoped for the best – and panicked about every step of the way." Unlike Daisy, Tessa rejected her previous methods of teaching and communicating with students and replaced them with new methods immediately. Either way, both Tessa and Daisy were recognizing that something about the way that they were engaging in online communicative interactions with students had to change – the previous way of communicating wasn't going to work in this crisis situation. Tessa also stated that during this period, she also asked her students to give her feedback on what was working in her communication practices with them and what could be improved. Even though these instructors were in a bricolage situation at the beginning of the pandemic, instructors like Tessa were attempting to build a feminist coalition with students right away by asking them for feedback and asking them specifically to shape the communicative interactions from the writing teacher.

Other writing instructors I interviewed learned how to communicate with students in crisis by learning from other people in the moment, which then becomes and transforms our antecedent knowledge. A few folks identified Dr. Rachel Gramer, the ISU Writing Program Director, as a person who was impactful during the Spring of 2020. Daisy describes Dr. Gramer's emails as "thoughtfully written" and how she could almost "see" someone behind the screen reading her emails and responding to them accordingly. Daisy felt as if the sudden move to everything online made her feel "like a robot or a machine," so observing someone respond

through online messaging with personal touches and reminders that "we are also human" was helpful to her. This is reminiscent of what Sheppard (2020) found in her early research on teachers after the switch to online learning in the Spring of 2020 - that sometimes teachers thought writing emails was not the "real work" of teaching and often felt as simply something to trudge through. As a graduate student, Daisy said that she was receiving "fewer but still meaningful" messages from her professors and those were helpful to see as well. Bella had similar comments about how she modeled her own messages after her professors and advisors, wanting to make her messages to students informative but also meaningful. When instructors in the survey were articulating what they value about communication with students, they discussed wanting to be clear with their messages but also wanting to use their messages to connect. However, sometimes the goals of clarity and connection can conflict – we might think of clarity as coldness or being detached, but also think that connection takes more time. Then in times of crisis, the difficulty of trying to both be clear and to connect is increased.

Carolyn Miller (1979) was the first TPC scholar to argue that technical communication was a humanistic field. The "human" who is writing the piece of technical communication and the "human" audience that is reading the message should both be considered. In their work on visual rhetoric decades later, Sam Dragga and Dan Voss (2001) build upon Miller's argument and state: "ethical visuals must be as humanistic as ethical words" (p. 266). During the time of crisis in Spring 2020, instructors were receiving technical communication crisis messages from administrators, professors, and peers and were therefore able to observe how others were composing their messages of crisis. One survey participant specifically talked about the "multiple feminist mentors" that they had during this time of crisis and discussed robust relationships with them. The messages that the feminist mentors were sending this participant

were described as “humanized and humanizing.” They learned about communicating during a crisis not just by reading what information was shared in messages, but by “seeing and sitting with how they [feminist mentors] framed their messages and how they talked ‘to’ us/people and not just ‘about’ us like we weren’t real and complex people on the other end of their messages.” This survey participant went on to state that the messages from their mentors were consistent and “revealed their values while doing work they were committed to.” The instructor went on to describe how the messages also revealed how we as writers can advocate for others, as well as for self when needed. They argue that instructors can replace academic posturing with “real talk,” and we can remind others that we need genuine humanizing communication at all times or we risk reproducing the institutional inequities that we claim to be rejecting and redressing. This aligns with Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) argument for intersectional coalition building and how it should be driven by the collective agenda and through the experiences of the people who are marginalized (p. 134).

Feminist mentors continue to lay vital groundwork for humanizing teaching, mentoring, and administration, modeling how to do that through written communication. Angela Haas, Christine Tulley, and Kristine Blair (2002) discuss how feminist mentors exist in decentralized writing spaces. While Haas, Tulley, and Blair describe feminist mentoring within the e-learning space, they assert that “our voices speak to teachers at all levels of the writing curriculum, “where they and in their classes students have felt themselves to be ‘novices’ in teaching and learning with technology, whether they are male or female” (p. 233). Haas, Tulley, and Blair maintain that feminist mentors should put themselves alongside their students to learn together, quoting Cynthia Caywood and Gillian Overing (1987) that the composition classroom “has the potential to be the single, most important learning experience for students if it provides them

with confidence in their own ideas and beliefs in their own authority" (p. xv). Similarly, Beth Godbee and Julia C. Novotny (2013) characterize feminist mentoring as co-mentors who "seek to deconstruct the hierarchical aspects of traditional mentoring and instead privileges relational aspects, emphasizing mutuality" (p. 179). With this approach in mind, writing teachers can shift from having power over students to having power with students. Lisa A. Costello (2015) also argues that feminist mentorship, in composition classrooms specifically, should be collaborative, rather than one person holding all of the power, in order to be equitable (p. 2-3). Costello admits that equity is an elusive term, but at its core, equity in the classroom through feminist mentorship is something "that make[s] you feel supported and valued" (p. 12). Within the context of the pandemic crisis of Spring 2020, feminist mentors were important for writing teachers to have in the academy and also to be for undergraduate students in (relatively) small university classrooms.

With so many bricolage pieces that instructors have to figure out how to adapt to fit their writing and teaching needs, inevitably not all of those pieces are equally helpful and can contradict one another and writers' experiences of attempting them. More importantly in times of crisis, we don't have time or capacity to determine the quality of the communicative interactions for ourselves, because of the quantity of information that was suddenly available. Hyehyun Hong and Hyo Jung Kim (2020) discuss the consequences of the information overload during the onset of COVID-19, such as general confusion, information, fatigue and burnout. As Tessa stated in her interview, she remembered feeling "wildly overwhelmed" from receiving floods of emails from academic administrators, other instructors, and students. She indicates that the barrage of emails were from groups of folks who were all just trying to "figure out how to do this communication." Again, most everyone in the online space was participating in bricolage, *all*

attempting to figure out how to be successful crisis technical communicators. Tessa went on to say that "trying to follow the advice just made me feel stuck when the advice didn't work." Tessa felt as if she was failing at communicating, even if she truly wasn't, which was "part of the problem with unsolicited advice and anxious folks," meaning that both she was anxious herself and so were the people giving and asking for so much advice online. One of the survey participants echoed this statement of feeling overwhelmed: "I didn't want to fail my students but I also wasn't confident on what was going to be the best methods to help them learn in the midst of a traumatic situation. There was SO much discourse about 'best practices' and often those methods conflicted." In addition to some teaching values that can conflict, such as with clarity and connection, some of the people giving and practicing advice also contradict each other. Divergent uptake can come from both the reception side (teachers receiving messages as readers and processing them as writers) *and* the production side (teachers creating messages as writers and using them toward teaching goals) because folks have different teaching and writing goals for themselves. That's why it's important to always consider individual teaching and writing identities and goals and how those individualized goals can be conveyed in online communicative interactions. Doing what writing instructors think is the "right thing" to do in certain situations isn't always the same goal as "doing my own thing, the way that I can do it right now." There needs to be a balance between these two goals, informed by implicit and explicit teaching identities.

What do teachers' actual online messages during the Spring 2020 crisis describe about communicative interaction?

Through examining the artifacts of online messages that writing instructors sent students during the initial pandemic-affected semester and analyzing responses to the questions regarding

those artifacts, I begin to answer my research question: How did pandemic communication affect how writing instructors conducted classes, thought about their teaching, or influenced their pedagogical goals? Instructors had to achieve their teaching goals through asynchronous writing, which of course mediated their initiation of written communicative interactions. As Olinger, Roozen and other writing studies scholars remind us, analyzing what folks say and write about their writing should be triangulated with the durable writing artifacts people write. Through their artifacts, writing teachers shared their attempts to reassure students, to recognize the difficulties that students were facing in crisis, to replace narratives of the uncaring teacher, and to build coalition through inclusion and open and honest communication.

I asked survey participants to share what their teaching goals were when they sent the crisis message artifact from the initial COVID-impacted Spring 2020 semester that they chose to share. A common goal that was voiced by participants was to reassure students – specifically, to recognize the impact of global health conditions and sudden changes that inequitably affected the working class, people of color, people with chronic health conditions and disabilities, and more. Thinking about Walton, Moore, and Jones' (2019) "4 R's" (recognize, revel, reject, and replace), I can see that some teachers were recognizing and revealing the injustices of the pandemic crisis for students. A participant noted that they were reassuring students not only because it was a global pandemic but because of the tumultuous US political climate of divided political parties and an upcoming presidential election at the end of 2020. Another participant reiterated that "most importantly, I wanted to make sure they knew that they were not alone in feeling lost, isolated, overwhelmed, anxious, etc. and that it was okay – welcome even – for them to take whatever time, energy, or their self-care measures they might need to get through." Similarly, another participant noted that they wanted to "acknowledge the varied material circumstances of

students at this time." Because of this particular crisis situation of an infectious disease and the resulting online modality of instruction, the teaching goal of reassuring students that might have been accomplished through in-person synchronous interaction and speaking as the primary mode, had to become writing goals for teachers as writers relying on asynchronous written modes of communication.

The communicative interactions during Spring 2020 also showed how instructors were rejecting the role of the teacher as someone who has to privilege course content and replacing the narrative of the 'strict teacher,' the 'uncaring teacher,' or the 'not-human teacher who does not struggle.' A participant stated that they wanted to share as many resources as possible with students, including themselves as a resource and as a sounding board. Many instructors wanted to make it clear to students that they were going to be there as a figure of support for students through crisis. Another participant mentioned that it was important to them to help students navigate the challenges of "abnormal times." Similarly, a participant mentioned that unlike other general education courses at ISU that are held in large lecture halls, this instructor indicated that they "knew all of the students because of the small class size. I knew all of their names and faces and they knew mine. I understood that I might be an instructor that students felt more comfortable reaching out to." Agreeing, a participant stated that they wanted their students to know that their "stories are validated, that they will be listened to" and that the instructor is "interested in how they are doing and coping with the stress." Here, instructors are rejecting the narrative that teachers don't care about student needs or emotional well-being and replacing the narrative with one of compassion and understanding. While this replacement narrative might be an additional emotional toll on teachers, it also helps to facilitate a more feminist communicative interaction. To illustrate the goal of using online messaging to reassure students, a participant

wrote in their message artifact, “Please take care of yourselves and know that I am here to support you. I am going to do what I can to make sure you all get through this class with the least amount of stress possible.” Another participant wrote in their artifact, “Please, do not hesitate to write to me and just tell me how you are doing, what you think about our next portion of the course, ask questions you have, etc. You can always call me if you need to talk.” Instructors are performing the TPC feminist approach of ethics of care when they are explicitly telling students that they care about their general well being and not just how they are performing academically in the class.

In analyzing the participants' submitted online message artifacts, many instructors made statements wanting to relate to students, to let them know that they are all going through challenges. For example, in one artifact, an instructor admits to students, “If you are not eager to study at all – well, I understand that too, believe me!” Another instructor in their artifact relayed, “I don't know about y'all, but I am feeling exhausted and overworked. Zoom fatigue + pandemic fatigue + election fatigue + regular end-of-semester fatigue is not a great combination.” By relating to students in this way and acknowledging that each person is struggling, including the instructor, it helps to build a coalition of support and togetherness. In this way, instructors are replacing the narrative that teachers are non-human figures of authority that always have things figured out and have replaced them with narratives of vulnerability and honesty, acknowledging to students that life can be tough for them too. This replacement narrative could encourage a more open and honest communicative interaction with students, allowing students to acknowledge their own humanity as well. If both parties in the communicative interaction are honest with one another, a more productive conversation can be had and more learning can be accomplished. Hengst (2020) discusses how in her own study, “Cindy Magic,” the success of the

communicative interaction happened when all parties were able to openly discuss what issues needed to be solved and contributed ideas about how to solve them (p. 23). Successful communication is based in disruptions and flexibility, which can be accomplished if all parties in the interaction are honest with their communications. "Honesty," in teachers writing to students, is not just about being truthful, but it is about being willing to engage in a negotiation related to what you want out of an exchange and what you are willing to offer. This includes being open about boundaries, both made by the recipient and by the author. For example, an instructor can be open and honest about their own struggles with students but that doesn't mean that they *always* have to be forthcoming about their emotional state. Likewise, students can set boundaries and choose when to be open about their emotional state with the instructor. Being honest in communicative interactions doesn't always have to mean being an open book; it can mean being open to discussing boundaries, among other sometimes challenging topics of discussion between teachers and students.

Some instructors through their artifacts wanted to share an appearance of "togetherness" – to convey that they had a plan for this class while also acknowledging the uncertainty of the situation. One participant stated that "I wanted people to know that I was 'on it,' that I was figuring things out (that's my job), and that I would be in communication with them again once I figured some things out." Another participant noted that they wanted students to feel "confident that I am their supporter in that drastic situation." In a survey participant's artifact, they express to students that "I am here to help you and to make this time less stressful!" Similarly, another participant said that they wanted to communicate their "readiness" to support students during the challenging transition. Another participant, less confidently, stated that they wanted to give students at least a "semblance of structure" during a "very scary and uncertain time." However,

throughout statements of confidence and structure, there was often an acknowledgement that there would need to be some flexibility – from the students and from the instructors. Writing instructors were discussing a need for some transparency about the work that they were doing to move forward with project schedules and with class expectations while also admitting that things might change in the weeks to come. Instructors were revealing to students that they aren't all-knowing beings that are confident facing the rest of the semester. They reject this narrative and replace it with one that values flexibility and compassion. In one participant's artifact, they stated, "I ask for your patience as we get through this process – things are not going to go perfectly, and there will probably be a lot of frustration. In return, I will be patient with you, and increase reminders and adjust my expectations accordingly."

Instructors also helped to build coalitions in their online classes through inclusion. Instructors attempted to replace the notion that teachers are the sole authority figure in the classroom community and the sole determiner of course schedules, expectations, and tools. Through input and reminders of peer co-learning and collaboration, they also replace narratives of learning and learners in isolation. A number of participants mentioned asking students for their input and asking students for advice about how the class should move forward, what new expectations seemed reasonable, and what technology they had access to or might be comfortable using. Asking students to help create a plan of action during a crisis is exactly the type of coalition building that Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) discuss as being so vital for successful technical writing. They cite Karma Chavez and her description of coalitions and how they "may be fleeting or may endure for some time, but it requires dedicated work to maintain" (p. 55). The coalitions that are established in the classroom are short term, simply because the coalition of the classroom only lasts for one semester. However, the long lasting effects of the

coalition that is built and the changes that were made can be taken into other classes, both by the students and by the instructor. And the needs of Spring 2020 were short-term but vital, as so much continued to change that year. Building on Chavez's characterization of coalitions, Walton, Moore, and Jones assert that coalitions are necessary for change because "they can shift and change quickly and because they engage difference and different goals without rejecting them" and that the 4 Rs "respond directly to the need for complex, inclusive intersectional approaches to doing social justice work in TPC" (p. 135). One of the most important aspects of being an ally within a coalition and performing the 4 Rs heuristic is to ask "yes, and" questions and statements: "Yes, and…how are you feeling? Yes, and…how can I help you? Yes, and…I agree with you: that's not how we act" (p. 137). In the case of participant writing teachers during Spring 2020 crisis, this looked like "yes, and how are you feeling?," "Yes, and how can I help you?," "Yes, and I agree that this is such a difficult time," and "Yes, and you can do this," among others.

Other participants in their messages focus on making sure that students communicate with one another as well during this shift to online learning. One instructor mentioned, "I encourage you all to start having conversations with your group about communication plans" in reference to a group writing project that they were currently working on. Another instructor prompted students to share their availability for small group conferences so that students can talk not only with their instructor but with their peers as well. Instructors are doing the work of coalition building through writing as technical writers and as teacher-writers through recognizing the needs of students in crisis and facilitating the communicative interaction between teacher to student and student to student. They are also rejecting the narrative that the plan for a course is

produced solely by the instructor and replacing that narrative with one of collective-class planning, scheduling, and co-learning.

It is important to note that there are consequences of instructors doing the work of the 4Rs in crisis. The consequences towards instructors go beyond just feeling not-confident. The job of instructors who are teaching and writing during a crisis is about surviving and it is also about doing a job that has changed so much. Instructors felt fear and sadness, which led to developments in empathy as a response. Responding in empathy is telling of instructors' reliance and generosity during this time of crisis. This is part of the TPC ethics of care, the instructor showing the student that they care about them as a human being, and it also is part of Hengst's (2020) argument for honesty and boundary setting. Sometimes, writing to students in crisis costs instructors their well-being, their certainty, and their feelings of knowing how to do a job well. The survey participants were asked to describe what they remember feeling while they were sending these initial crisis messages to students. Even though the writing instructors wanted to appear confident and sure-footed while leading the class into a new teaching scenario, many of the instructors revealed in the survey that they did not feel as confident as the message they wrote might make it seem. Even though we might want to reject the notion that the instructor is confident and has it all together, that rejection takes time and confidence that instructors might not have in times of crisis. Completely rejecting the role of being "together" has ramifications for the people who rely on the instructor's ability to function in order to help students maintain their course progress and to not add burdens to their already difficult lives and semester, particularly for those in their first year of college. A disorganized, chaotic instructor has a different set of costs for students, which many participants seemed implicitly aware of.

Another contradiction occurs in what the instructor is feeling and what the instructor reveals, or chooses not to reveal, to students. Many participants remarked that they were worried about what the future might hold - inside of the class and beyond. One participant remarked, "I was just trying my best to survive while still doing my job." Another participant mentioned, "I remember crying, being afraid to leave my house, communicating with colleagues and friends at all times in multiple platforms." Another participant remarked about how they felt looking back at this message two years removed: "I also feel really fucking sad that we had to do anything that we did…that we experienced so much uncertainty, pressure, stress, fear, anxiety, and worry - because it lasted such a damn long time and has affected us to this day." A few participants mention empathy when looking back at their initial crisis messages to students, both empathy for their past selves and empathy that they felt in that writing moment: 1) "My role during that critical time should be filled with empathy, understanding, and support as much as possible. Just helping them get through"; 2) "I still carry that empathetic approach towards my students and keep those feelings close as I plan activities and assignments"; 3) "Looking back, I want to give that girl a hug. She looks like she has it all together but she is so scared." Almost all of the participants remarked that they were anxious, but they were trying to do their best under the extreme circumstances in ways that still invoke an emotional response two years later and have stuck with them since then, which is the focus of Chapter 4.

The emotional labor of communicating with students struggling during global crisis

The Writing Program at ISU reminds us that it is *always* impossible to separate bodies from writing and teaching because we rely on a sociocultural approach to teaching writing as embodied literate activity in the world. Feelings and labor were then just more extreme and heightened during March 2020. The context of the writing and teaching that I investigated for

this project was intertwined with trauma and crisis, hence one of my research questions: What were some of the affective responses of writing instructors when composing online messages to students during the pandemic? During interviews with writing teachers, some questions inquired about students who were struggling during the initial COVID-19 impacted semester, Spring 2020. The upheaval of this semester was emotionally taxing for writing teachers and students, and it was also a shared trauma that we were experiencing together.

When asked to tell a story about communicating with a struggling student, almost every teacher discussed emotional labor. For example, one of Edward's students reached out to him via email to let him know that a family member had passed away. Edward said that he could feel this student's "hopelessness, fatigue, fears, and many anxieties" through this message. However, one of this student's primary concerns that they shared in the message was about "being scared about failing the course" as this student had failed to turn in some of their assignments during this difficult time. Edward responded to the student's email with empathy and understanding, letting them know that they could take as much time as was needed to complete their assignments. There is sharp sadness in comprehending how a student can feel sorrow and concern about not only losing a family member but about their current academic standing in their class. The stress of personal loss is compounded by the stress of fear of academic failure and that fear is further compacted by the stressors living in a global pandemic.

As in Edward's story, many other writing teachers voiced similar stories of students being open about their emotional state during the pandemic. One of Hazel's students relayed the amount of loss that she was experiencing throughout the Spring 2020 semester. This student's father contracted COVID-19 and went to the hospital after his symptoms worsened and was put on a ventilator. Her sister also contracted COVID-19 and went to the hospital as well. Finally,

near the end of the semester, the student's father passed away. Hazel describes this email correspondence throughout the semester with this student as "intense." Hazel offered in almost every email message to her student, "whatever you need, we'll figure it out" and tried to reiterate that she was so sorry that this student was dealing with this horrific situation. Hazel wanted the student to know that she cared about her and that she was there for her emotionally as a human but also as her teacher by being lenient with due dates and sharing that she should try not to worry about her grade in the class. While Hengst's early work on communicative interaction (2020) does not specifically address emotional labor, it's important to note that being a writing teacher during a global pandemic made it impossible to separate writing and bodies in new ways that we hadn't experienced before.

Another writing teacher Rebecca shared a story about a student who was crying during a Zoom call about feeling so stressed and anxious about her experiences in other classes, wondering whether or not she was going to be able to successfully finish a semester or even if she should drop out of college altogether. Rebecca said that this student was sitting with "utter disappointment" that her first semester at a four-year university, where she was just beginning to feel good in her routines, making friends, and in general having things going well for her, had turned completely upside down so quickly. In this story of communicative interaction, Rebecca and her student were communicating over Zoom. While the student was visibly crying during the meeting, Rebecca used the "Chat" feature on Zoom to reassure her that "struggling is real" and let the student have space to express their emotions or take breaks from speaking. After this initial Zoom meeting, Rebecca checked in with this student by email weekly, giving her extra time on writing projects and suggesting alternatives that might take less emotional labor for the student. Similar to Edward's student, Rebecca's student was expressing intense fear and grieving

over grades and academic performance. The emotional labor of messaging between teachers and students during the time of the Spring 2020 crisis greatly impacted the communicative interactions. Because the communicative interactions were so altered from the "norm" because of current crisis circumstances, teachers were having to learn new ways of communicating and writing to students in ways that were both discursive and embodied. Instructors were having to replace their previous understandings of communicative interactions with students as reserved or impersonal with new understandings that their relationship was charged with emotion that could not be separated.

Another writing teacher Clara tells a similar story about how after not hearing from one of her students for quite a while and not seeing any new work, reached out in a "low-key" email message to check in on the student about their lack of participation. The student divulged that she had quickly lost both of her grandparents, whom she was very close to, to COVID-19. After sharing this personal trauma with Clara, the student went on to keep reiterating that she "is not normally like this at all" and "all of this online learning is just really hard for me." She even went on to ask if Clara needed some documentation sent to her to prove that her grandparents had passed away. Clara was taken aback by how this student felt the need to justify why she wasn't acting like her "normal" student self and felt obligated to relay this traumatic story, while offering to provide proof. Clara thought to herself, "Who hurt you? Who made you feel like you had to do this?" Clara gave her condolences to the student and conveyed that she did not need any documentation and that the student could take their time turning in projects. Clara argued that "we can be flexible where we need to be…and that doesn't have to only happen under extenuating circumstances." There is a cost of replacing the "non-feeling" teacher with one that acknowledges emotion – the cost being uncomfortable with being vulnerable, experiencing

emotion at work, and the uncertainty of writing and teaching in ways that are unfamiliar. However, when replacing this narrative there are benefits as well, such as building a coalition of real-feeling-humans within the classroom to help further facilitate effective learning through vulnerability and honesty. Teachers had to find ways of abandoning teaching or teacher narratives that didn't really work before either, or at least not as well as we may have been led to believe – meaning that it may have been a safer choice for teachers to not feel or not try to control everything.

In the interview with Lucy, she shared a similar story about a student who expressed that she was worried Lucy thought she was "flaky" or a "bad student" because she wasn't coming to class regularly. This student also expressed that she didn't have wifi at home so she had to go to other locations to do her work, such as her local McDonald's to use their wifi. Lucy said that in all of her messages to students during this time, she kept thinking about the concept of "grace" and making sure that she extended grace and understanding to all students. There are two sides to the coin of emotional labor: the student's side of trying to complete the course and the teacher's side of trying to support the student through the course. This emotional labor does not pertain to the writing class in particular but pertains to teaching and learning in a global crisis. The Writing Program at ISU accounts for preparing teachers to help support students through a course, but did not initially teach people how to do so through writing in moments of crisis, so teachers had no training for this particular type of emotional labor via communicative interactions.

The writing teachers that I interviewed were open and honest when they expressed the emotional toll that communicating with students that were struggling had on them. In a story that Daisy shared, she discussed how a student requested a video call with her over FaceTime because he wanted to talk through his ideas for a project, rather than going back and forth

through email. The student expressed that he learns better this way, and it would also be better for him because of his busy work schedule. This student shared with Daisy that he had taken up as many part time jobs and extra shifts as possible as so many folks were quitting their jobs. Keeping in mind that video calling with students was still a fairly new practice, Daisy was apprehensive about having a private video call with a student as it was "a bit too much or a bit too personal." However, Daisy kept telling herself that "it was a one-time thing to 'invite' some student to my personal device/space…in the end I felt okay because it helped someone get something done." In this story, Daisy is showing how writing instructors were not only communicating with students in ways that were new to them, but they were maybe communicating in ways that were emotionally more laborious or even uncomfortable. During initial COVID months, there was a pressure of expectation to carry on communicative interactions despite personal discomfort and additional emotional labor, and a pressure to use personal devices and platforms not previously used for work. This is a consequence of feeling like we have to shift our boundaries to redress the inequities people are experiencing because of the global crisis and shifts in institutional conditions of not having any in-person classes and students not living on campus. Sometimes, these expectations were implicit as campus culture shifted during transition. At other times, they were explicit in messages from university and department administrators and the material conditions that closed down campus to teachers and forced people to use their own devices and resources from home (including people who got or upgraded home internet out of their own salary).

Writing teachers were also using new tools for communicative interactions with students. Learning how to use new tools is yet another emotionally taxing activity for teachers who are being asked to learn more and adapt in different ways during a time of crisis. In a story similar to

Daisy's, Bella expressed that she often communicated with students over one-on-one video calling to discuss projects and get caught up on assignments. Bella indicated that these students were not consistent in their attendance in her online Zoom class because of "outside issues" and having difficulties keeping up with the schedule. Bella notes that this was an unusual practice because, for her, the COVID-19 semesters highlighted the increase in one-on-one conversations that she was having with her students as opposed to the lack of individual conversations of students pre-COVID when she would host in-person office hours. Again, this indicates how writing teachers were communicating with students in ways that they were not in previous semesters before the pandemic because of the affective complications that the COVID-19 semesters brought. This is not just about the tools used for communication, but it is also about time – the time that is suddenly asked of us when people's schedules change mid-semester and when teaching a class of 23 students essentially also becomes concurrently individual tutoring for many of those 23 students. While many of the artifacts that teachers provided were of messages sent to the entire class, they also shared stories like this one of individual communicative interactions that were often harder to trace and more ephemeral (not in durable artifacts). Those ephemeral communicative interactions being more necessarily one-on-one because of the isolated nature of initial COVID months (geographically and for public health reasons).

Other writing teachers expressed the emotional labor of the lack of communication that they were often getting from students as well. In one survey response, an instructor mentioned that many of their students "disappeared" after the transition to online learning in the Spring of 2020 and did not communicate much if at all. Another writing teacher mentioned in their survey response that during the COVID-impacted semesters, many students either stopped responding to

messages completely or would take two to three weeks to respond to individual messages. One survey respondent stated: “Sometimes it felt like I was just shouting into the void. Not knowing what was going on with some students was equally as anxiety-inducing as the students who were sending me multiple emails a week.” Communicative interactions that require interaction in order to function carry the emotional labor of uncertainty when teachers feel their initial communication interaction outreach is not picked up by students. Teachers still feel responsible for student success. When a writing goal of open communication fails, it complicates a teaching goal of wanting to support *all* members of a class. This break in the communicative interaction could create future emotional labor when people reappear toward the end of the semester, for example, or add to additional thoughts of failing as a teacher if students are failing the course.

In some communicative interactions, the students might not respond for a long time, or when they do respond, they respond with only their own emotional states and concerns in ways that ask a great deal of emotional labor of teachers without being able to build relationships and without enough space to address any pedagogical support beyond emotional support as people. Then instructors might feel as if they have to alleviate their concerns while also feeling unsure if the student is going to send them a message in response again or go back to not responding. Instructors might not have the same kind of established relationship with students who respond infrequently as with those who participate more in communicative interactions; therefore, making a connection between emotional labor and relationality. In one example, Tessa indicated that often her conversations with students who were struggling in her class ended up being one-sided in that students simply stopped responding to her online communication messages. If students did respond after a long period of silence, these messages were usually letters of apology but lacked any plan to address their work in the class. One student in particular

expressed that they did not want their teachers "to be disappointed in them" and felt guilty for how much their anxiety and depression was affecting them. Tessa stated that this student's message was eye-opening for her. She expressed that she had an "immediate teacher response," which was to address the plan of turning in some of their work late. However, Tessa thought about how it's "almost impossible to learn when our body and mind is in a state of distress" and how this message was a reminder that we should "address the human before the labor [of writing work for the course]." Tessa began her message reassuring the student that she was not disappointed in them, that she was grateful that the student reached out, and that she hopes that they could be proud of themselves for doing the work.

Tessa gives us an important reminder that even if communication seems one-sided, "Sometimes life does this thing where it doesn't matter what you do or how hard you try, things just won't go right. And some days your body just needs rest…some days we need to be proud of the ways we take accountability for the ways in which we haven't been able to work." Infrequent communicative interactions require emotional labor, too, sometimes in different ways than ones that are more frequent. There is an additional uncertainty and less established relationality in less frequent interactions. Emotional labor of teachers was complicated during Spring 2020 because of: 1) the immense amount of time taken to focus on communicating; 2) an increase of one-on-one interactions with students; 3) having little to no in-person interactions with students; 4) taking on intense emotional responses from students; 5) anxieties related to having a lack of response from students.

Conclusions from writing teachers' 2020 crisis messages

The communicative interactions between writing teachers and students are already so complex. Then, when the addition of a global health crisis comes into play, those interactions

become even more complicated by new writing goals and practices, altered teaching goals and practices, and shifts in intensity and frequency of emotional labor. Writing instructors did their best to support students. People did their best, but there was an emotional toll. Even so, teachers persevered and took what they knew about crisis communication from those around them and relied on their antecedent knowledge. As an instructor during the Spring 2020 semester myself, I remember how hard it was to be a teacher and to be a human. I wanted to help students to the best of my ability but did not always know how to do that when my only option was for that communicative interaction to be in an exclusively online, asynchronous space. Spring 2020 utterly changed my writing identity. I was writing in ways to students that were completely different. I was not only messaging more frequently, but I was thinking about how to make my online messages more intentional, thoughtful, and purposeful towards my teaching goals. I was writing in ways that acknowledge the human part of writing and learning, which is not something I was doing pre-pandemic. I found myself rejecting much of what I thought before about online communicative interactions with students and replaced them with narratives of clarity, support, inclusion, and hope. Now, in 2023, we are out of the immediate crisis of a pandemic, but the way that I write to students has been altered from how I was communicating in those spaces before 2020. For me, that change is a good thing – which I share in Chapter 4.

Triangulating what writing teachers wrote during 2020 and wrote and said as research participants in 2022, I can see how writing instructors were incorporating TPC feminist crisis communication values into how they thought about instructor to student communicative interactions and their online message artifacts to students. Even without adequate or proper preparation for how to take on this new way of communicating, writing instructors were trying to create writing goals working toward equitable teaching goals. From the stories that writing

instructors shared about students who were struggling during the Spring 2020 semester, students were also not prepared to participate in the communicative interaction activity system of online-only crisis communication. Whether students were over-communicating or under-communicating, many students were struggling – both in the class and outside of it – which created additional emotional labor for teachers in relation to maintaining and guiding communicative interactions both in a single moment and over time.

I would argue that many of the writing teachers I surveyed and interviewed would not characterize themselves as technical communicators, yet their communicative interactions with students during Spring 2020 were profoundly situated in crisis TPC. Many of the writing instructors who were teaching during the initial pandemic-affected semester were unprepared to write to students during crisis, especially when writing was the primary, if not sole, way of communicating with students. The question is then raised: How could writing teachers be more prepared to engage with students in communicative interactions online? The answer is not necessarily more training, especially if that training is mandatory and stuffed inside an already overwhelming and robust new-teacher orientation. What would be helpful is to develop multiple means of supporting people that explicitly treat teachers as workplace communicators who are writers with writing goals, in addition to being teachers with teaching goals. In addition, what would be helpful is not a one-off training session but diverse kinds of support woven into existing structures for both new *and* returning teacher support. This could include individual mentoring, peer group support, written artifacts, genre examples, and more.

Using the ISU Writing Program as an example, structures of support already exist, such as new teacher orientation every fall, professional development teaching days for new and returning teachers each fall and spring semester, and a writing program leadership team who

support training, mentorship, and other program projects. Writing teachers can develop their online communicative interaction skills and understanding whether they are new or veteran teachers and they can find value in this learning and development of communication skills all of the time, not only during crises. As Rachel Gramer (2023) argues, new writing teacher research frequently privileges existing program structures as a primary site for study (p. 40), so it might be useful to think about how we could implement online communicative interaction training into already existing structures. However, as Gramer warns, we should focus on new writing teacher identities, learning, and motivated behaviors at the center of inquiry. Sometimes training can lean towards a set of "best practices" or arguments for what teachers "should be" doing in the classroom, whereas training on online communicative interactions should be based on individual teaching and writing identities and how to use online messaging as a teaching tool and part of teachers' pedagogy to achieve their teaching, learning, and writing goals.

It is important to reiterate Marsen's (2020) characterization of crises as: "complex and multifaceted phenomenon and crisis communication research emphasizes different aspects and uses diverse methods to analyze them" (p. 164). TPC writers need to consider their own identity and social position when constructing texts while also considering the stakeholders (p. 168). Again, this is very similar to how writing studies research discusses the importance of power and positionality of the writer and the recipient of communication messages. Marsen's findings of best practices of crisis communication include having a rapid response, an appropriate spokesperson to communicate the information, paying close attention to local cultures, and being able to cater to diverse audiences – all of which can be accomplished through feminist and social justice means of technical communication. From analyzing the data from the message artifacts and from the survey results, I can understand how ISU writing instructors had a sentiment that

they should be feminist technical communicators and why it is important to have feminist communicative interactions with students. From their bricolage of relying on antecedent knowledge of communication skills and looking to mentors who were successfully doing crisis communication, they were trying to incorporate some of the TPC feminist communication values. If the writing instructors were further prepared to participate in online communicative interactions with students, then instructors could have even further supported students in their learning in ways that it's still important for us to learn from now, which is the focus of Chapter 4.

The complexities of writing teachers being crisis communicators in 2020 took its toll on writing teachers and impacted both their teaching identities and their writing identities. It took intense emotional labor from both teachers and students in the communicative interaction – both when that interaction was successful and when it was not. Writing to students in Spring 2020 cost teachers their certainty as teachers and as writers and had them questioning whether or not they were being effective teachers and effective communicators, in other words, questioning if they were being successful at their job. While it was difficult, there were some valuable outcomes in that teachers were beginning to use online messages with students as a teaching tool and beginning to see online communicative interactions with students as closely associated with their pedagogy. Writing teachers were trying to survive – both in the pandemic-stricken world and in their newly altered classrooms. While we might not go through a global pandemic again in our lifetime, the circumstances of Spring 2020 have altered us as instructors in ways that we should continue to pay attention to. In the next chapter, I will analyze how instructors' communicative interactions changed in subsequent semesters.

CHAPTER IV: DIVERGENT UPTAKE OF WRITING TEACHERS' ONLINE COMMUNICATIVE INTERACTIONS WITH STUDENTS SINCE SPRING 2020

After the immediate crisis of teaching during the Spring 2020 semester, writing instructors had to continue to adapt to new ways of teaching and communicating with students in subsequent semesters as we navigated through online-only teaching, to hybrid teaching, and back to in-person teaching. But what did we, as teachers, learn from the initial COVID-impacted semester about writing? And what did our communicative interactions with students look like as we moved forward through the pandemic? The focus of this chapter is on analyzing data about writing teachers' experiences after Spring 2020. Overall, the most significant change that I discovered through this second half of my research is that writing to students was becoming more of a mediational influence of writing instructors' writing practices, their thinking about pedagogical practices, and their treatment of online communicative interactions with students.

As a feminist researcher, I continue to practice self-reflection by including and analyzing my own communicative interaction initiation message to students. I sent this message to students during Spring 2021 - one year removed from the initial COVID-impacted semester. Not all university courses at ISU were being taught exclusively online, but nearly all English department courses were taught online. Writing Program instructors had the option to teach courses synchronously or asynchronously. Later, in the Fall of 2021, classes in the English department included more in-person classes, but instructors could choose to make their courses hybrid, including both in-person and online modalities. When this message was sent, in Spring 2021, I

was teaching my class exclusively online asynchronously. This was the first message that I sent students, introducing them to the class:

> Hello, Everyone!
>
> Welcome to English 145, Writing in the Academic Disciplines. I'm happy to have you here and I'm excited to get to learn with y'all!
>
> There a few things that I want to point out to you on our ReggieNet page that you should get familiar with as we begin the spring semester:
>
> Our class syllabus
>
> Weekly Agenda Lessons page
>
> Assignments tab
>
> You will notice in our weekly agenda that you have your first mini-assignment due on Tuesday, by midnight. As we will be interacting with one another in this class often in this online space, I want everyone to introduce themselves and get to know one another a little bit better. Selfishly, this is so that I can get to know you better as well - you'll notice that I posted the first Flipgrid introduction video, and this is where the rest of you will post/respond as well: [Link Redacted]
>
> This first week is all about building our classroom community and getting familiar with what this class will be about, including our course theme: multimodality.
>
> I am always available through email [Email Redacted] but I am also hosting "Lunchtime Chats" every week on Thursdays from 1-2 pm. This are optional class meetings times that are much more informal (and I will most likely be eating/cooking lunch during these times and you are welcome to as well). Come and chat with me and your peers about the week's concepts, readings, assignments, and more. You can come for the full hour or pop in and out (again, this is an informal class session). If you are looking for some structure to your week, some accountability, some clarification or enhanced learning, or maybe just for some human connection - we would love to see you there.
>
> Cheers,
>
> Prof. Capan

Figure 3 - Capan Email Message Sent Spring 2021

Looking back at this message now, while also keeping my initial artifact that I analyzed in mind, I can see that I was much more comfortable communicating with students in online spaces than I was a year prior because I included more detailed formatting in this message and was more

aware of how this message would visually be taken up by students. I also included further multimodal composing to support student learning and community building. I broke up all of my information into multiple paragraphs and a bulleted list so that the content was easily digestible for students to comprehend. Multimodality was playing such a significant part in our lives at the moment, inside the classroom and out. I decided to make multimodality the theme of the course because not only were we communicating in multimodal ways, but also we needed to better understand how to communicate in multimodal ways effectively and successfully. I began the course with a video introduction, both from myself and from students.

What surprises me looking back at this message now is my introduction of "Lunchtime Chats" – these were informal Zoom sessions that I would hold once a week. As I stated in the message, I was attempting to further connect with students on a personal level because we were not going to be meeting in an in-person classroom. I wanted to give students the opportunity to ask questions about the class, chat with their classmates and with myself, and foster a sense of classroom community. These Zoom meetings were not mandatory and were, in a way, also in place of a traditional office hour. However, I don't remember this initiative so much looking back because I stopped these "Lunchtime Chat" sessions after one month. I canceled the recurring meetings because students were not coming to them. I remember that I had one student come to one session, where they asked a clarifying question about their assignment and then left. The "Lunchtime Chats" were not performing how I intended or how I expected. I thought that students would be longing for that sense of human connection, as it was something that I was longing for myself. I truly missed being in the classroom and getting to interact with students on a daily basis.

I was so disheartened when I sat in these empty Zoom meetings, waiting and hoping for folks to pop in. Even though we were no longer in the initial crisis stage, the emotional aspect of communicative interactions during subsequent pandemic-affected semesters continued. This communicative interaction initial attempt was a failure in that it didn't produce any kind of interaction chain. However, with many ISU classes still online or hybrid, students might have had other classes that they were attending during my chosen synchronous meeting time, or they may have had work obligations that they were still attending to or home obligations if students had yet to return back to campus. Other students might have been experiencing online burnout from attending so many other Zoom synchronous meetings throughout the week. So my initial outreach for communicative interaction was hindered in this particular system at this particular moment in time.

In this chapter, I have broken down my analysis into three major sections guided by research questions that can help unpack my own and other writing teachers' stories of writing beyond Spring 2020:

1. What are writing teachers' divergent uptake of experiences with online communicative interactions as a teaching tool?
    a. Reexamining the past
    b. Analyzing the present
2. How have writing teachers' writing and teaching values and goals for communicative interactions with students changed since Spring 2020?
    a. What clarity looks like for teacher-writers
    b. What support looks like for teacher-writers
3. What does "new normal" look like for teacher-writers now?

In this chapter, I analyze data from survey results, shared Fall 2020-Fall 2022 artifacts, interview transcripts, and interview questionnaires. To analyze this data, I used the same seven tags as in Chapter 3: tools, teaching goals, writing practices, identity, learning, people or structures of support, and emotions. Similar to Chapter 3, some of these tags yielded more significant results and revealed more notable patterns than others. In this chapter, I am not aiming to prove that crisis communication during COVID-19 has directly caused people to change all communication interactions with students. Instead, as a writing studies researcher, I understand that all writing and learning experiences are mediational and change who we are and therefore how, what, and why we write. The goal of my writing studies approach to writing teacher research isn't to simplify a writing activity by identifying a single reason for a change but to continue to keep writing complex and try to describe and unpack some of the multiple mediational influences at work: time, feelings, people, goals, spaces, tools, and, in this case, particular conditions for working, teaching, learning, and writing.

Writing teachers' divergent uptake of experiences with online communicative interaction as a teaching tool

During my research, I was interested in understanding how writing teachers perceive their moments of learning about online communicative interactions with students over the past two years since the initial onset of COVID-19. I wanted to know more about what their divergent uptake process of writing and teaching looked like in relation to their teaching practices and pedagogies. As defined in Chapter 3, divergent uptake, as described by the ISU Writing Program, is the different ways that people can take up information, ideas, and practices. Collectively, participants shared that their experiences writing to students during the pandemic affected how they think about writing to students in online communicative interactions and how

they think about using those moments of online communicative interactions as teaching tools. But what each participant chose to focus on in the moment of responding to my questions was, of course, widely divergent – which is telling of their different uptake of what they think mattered most about their learning: about communication frequency, new digital tools, feelings of uncertainty and empathy, building community, interacting with students in new ways, and changes in the function of online messages. In this section, I share 2 things: 1) participants' perceptions about what they think about 2020-2022 looking back; and 2) participants' perceptions about their current practices.

Reexamining the past

When participants reflected on the Fall 2020-Spring 2022 online communicative interactions with students that they shared with me, some participants focused on how they changed the frequency of their written communication with students during this time. One participant recounts: "I think I also felt proud that I wrote to people each week in a writing class as a writing teacher. In the past, for in-person classes, I hadn't written consistently 'to' all students by direct address message; I had only written things 'for' class that I showed up with, and email was mostly for individual students when they or I had concerns. This structure felt more like a teaching and learning tool, something pedagogical as well as logistical." This crisis moment in time allowed writing teachers to write as professional writers in ways that they had not done before–notably, in the *writing* classroom. In this participant's example, they used online messages as more than a posting of assignment due dates but rather as a weekly communication addressed to the class, not only handling the logistics but as a way to connect with students, build community, and share resources. The teaching practice represented in this online communicative interaction was changing for this instructor, making their teaching selves more present in and

through writing, which has potential consequences for changing our perceptions of our teaching identities over time.

Rather than frequency, some participants focused more on the number of digital tools they started to use during COVID-19. One participant said that through the use of different digital tools, they had a "wonderful rapport" with students who were "outstanding, helpful, and cooperative." In their message artifact sent in Spring 2021, they write to students, asking them to share "any fun things" that they are up to and reminding them to use Discord as another point of contact. The participant was in fairly consistent contact with students and seems comfortable and familiar with them in/through writing. Communicating on multiple different platforms, this participant also mentions discussions in Padlet. The introduction of multiple new teaching methods using digital tools–whose use increased in the ISU Writing Program during COVID–shows one writing teacher's particular uptake using digital tools to support students as real people who are the audience for our communicative interaction initiations. For this participant, the new situation of teaching online asynchronously opened up new opportunities to develop communication tools as teaching tools–and the teaching skills needed to effectively use those tools.

In my research, some participants also focused on how they felt about what they wrote to students – and what could have been different (or not). I wanted to know more about whether or not they would go back and change things about how they have written their messages and practiced their online communicative interactions with students. A few of the instructors were kind towards themselves when reflecting on what could have been different, knowing that they cannot exactly change what choices they made. Bella stated that she believed that she did what worked both for her and for students and said that she made the best decisions that she could

with the information she had access to at the time. Daisy discussed how, at the time of the initial crisis and beyond, she tried her best to be empathetic and thought that she did the best that she could under the circumstances. She also said that, even though she was active in her initial outreach communicative interaction messages to students, some students "just disappeared" and stopped participating in the online communicative interaction. She said that she's not sure what else she could have done to prevent that breakdown of communication. So while some participants had a clear takeaway about their frequency of communication and the use of digital tools, Daisy's uptake diverged from that kind of clarity and was instead uncertain about the effectiveness of the frequency of her messages. No one class of students will respond the same to one particular practice. It is important for teachers to remember that we are not the only ones who experience divergent uptake, but that the random grouping of 18-23 students in a writing class experience a particular semester and our teaching tools differently, too.

Some instructors were uncertain about the changes that they were making to their writing practices, such as changing the frequency of initial online communicative interaction messages. However, certain boundaries do matter to instructors in online communicative interactions with students. Rebecca relayed to me during her interview that she was also somewhat uncertain about what changes in her writing practices as a writing teacher would have been better when looking back at her writing, learning, and teaching journey over the last few years. On the one hand, she would want to change things, but, on the other hand, she also realizes that she might not have been successful with any additional changes. At first, Rebecca shared that maybe she would have spent less time or energy in her online communicative interactions with students. However, after further contemplation, she said that if she did give less time or energy towards this part of her teaching, she would not be as proud of how she communicated through writing to

students in a time of crisis. She wishes that she would have found better ways to have distance from being on email "all of the time." This is something that Bella brought up in her interview as well: she had to create boundaries of time with her online communicative interactions. Rebecca stated that after March 2020, she was on email all the time through the rest of the calendar year. Sometime in 2021, Rebecca took the notification badge off on her Outlook app on her phone and on her laptop so that she would, hopefully, stop checking her email app constantly. Now, in 2023, Rebecca is in "the mood of 'that's a hard no from me' about checking email sometimes or having the app open on my laptop." But she also recognized during our conversation that this way of putting boundaries around constant communication has its own set of consequences.

Rebecca, Daisy, and Bella indicated that they learned from this experience of communicating in a crisis, but they were unsure how any writing changes would have made the outcome of teaching moments any different or any better. However, divergent uptake across writing teachers makes visible that some people did have specific changes in mind. Some writing instructors indicated that they might have changed some particular communication strategies, techniques, and tools, looking back on their pandemic teaching journey now. During the interview with Edward, he stated that he wished he would have been more empathetic towards students in online communicative interactions, as he has experienced since this time that more empathy leads to a better learning experience. He also said that he wished he would have tried out other platforms that rely on different modalities than he was used to, modes beyond exclusively alphabetic writing. Similarly, in the interview with Mia, she wished she "would have added more emotional elements" to her messages. She also wishes that she added in more visuals to her online messages sooner, something that she is conscious of doing more now. Both Mia and Edward are continuing to think about how they can use multimodality in online communicative

interaction messages to students, which we might expect from a writing program that emphasizes multimodality in our learning practices and sees teaching as a multimodal activity. However, it's equally important to unpack the teaching goals of using multimodal communication: as a pedagogical tool for emotional support and showing empathy to support student learning.

Tessa is an example of a writing instructor who shows how seemingly discrete uptakes converge in learning moments and experiences of message frequency, digital tools, empathy, and boundary setting. Tessa noted that she is continuing to think about communicative interactions with students and how they can be improved. The lesson that she is still learning is to "put the human before the labor," and she has to be conscious of doing that in her online messages with students now. Tessa uses Microsoft Teams to communicate with students online, but often the platform itself makes it difficult for her to think about empathy for students first. The notification bubble and notification sound alert makes Tessa feel pressured to respond to students immediately. Often students use Teams to ask quick, logistical questions and not as often ask questions that specifically call for moments of empathy. Tessa is still trying to establish boundaries with her time, attempting to balance answering questions or concerns quickly for students but in a way that is understanding and empathic, addressing feelings too. For all writing teachers, the learning process is never linear, nor does it end. For Tessa, she is continuing to struggle with what goals she can accomplish–and when those goals conflict–based on her particular uptake from her pandemic teaching and using online communicative interactions with students as teaching tools.

Analyzing the present

During my interview research, I asked how participants' writing and teaching practices and thoughts about writing pedagogy had changed since Spring 2020. I wanted to further

understand their divergent uptake of teaching, learning, and writing during an ongoing pandemic and how their writing identity and therefore their thoughts on writing and teaching writing might have changed. Some people's divergent uptake about current practices in 2022 (at the time of this study) is similar to their divergent uptake of what they did and learned in 2020 and 2021. In his interview, Edward shared that his communication practices during the Spring 2020 semester were very frequent. His message frequency now is lessened; however, he is still participating in online communicative interactions with students more now than he was in pre-pandemic times. Bella and Rebecca are still focusing on creating boundaries for online communicative interactions with students. But there are also notable differences in where people's divergent uptake has taken them in relation to both their writing and teaching practices and identities.

Mediated by his particular uptake, Edward now uses writing to accomplish his teaching goal of building community. He stated that his teaching goals for online communicative interactions with students are fairly the same as his in-person communicative interactions with students. His writing goals, which now work toward his teaching goals, are focused on "building links, sharing information, being heard, and being understood." Edward said that the most impactful takeaway about what he learned about online communicative interactions with students over the past two years is "when and how you communicate with your students helps foster a sense of community, which helps them feel connected to you and their colleagues." Edward said that his uptake from this crisis impacts his teaching to this day because using writing to build relationships can then have a positive impact on people's learning of writing in the course.

Others, like Bella, have uptake experiences that have changed how they practice teaching every day through student interactions. Bella shared in her interview that her time writing to

students during the initial crisis, and the time since, has affected how she thinks about her own teaching practices and pedagogies. While Edward's uptake focuses on using writing to connect with students, Bella's experience has taught her how to be organized, transparent, and consistent as a teacher. Pre-pandemic, Bella said that her teaching persona was a "figure it out on your own type" when it came to student questions about writing projects and her expectations for them. During the pandemic when she was teaching online, she was much more explicit about telling students what was expected and where they could find resources. Bella's uptake has affected her pedagogy, specifically helping her see the need to build a scaffolding structure into her course– and use her online communicative interactions with students to do so. She now understands how she can use writing to extend her teaching to moments that happen outside of class time. Bella has changed both how she uses writing and her choices about when to respond to students in writing. Bella shared that, since there was a shift in 2020 that made teaching spaces and living spaces the same, creating boundaries of when to respond to students was something that she had not done pre-pandemic. Now, instead of being the "figure it out on your own" teacher, Bella provides resources and then feels comfortable saying in relation to student questions, "It can always wait."

For many participants, the part of their uptake they identify as most important is the actual function of writing online messages to students, seeing them as ways to begin communicative interaction opportunities. One survey participant mentioned that their messages to students have now become a teaching tool whereas before their messages were "simple updates about things happening in the classroom, such as a changed due date, or reminders about upcoming class activities or project deadlines." During an interview, Mia said that her online communicative interactions with students became more "tailored to student learning and

teaching needs" after the onset of the pandemic because she directly asked students what they needed from her in that communication space. Rebecca shared that her online communication with students pre-pandemic was only to give brief updates and announcements, whereas post-pandemic she used her online communication students as teaching tool to achieve goals of "transparency, clarity, explicit prioritizing, as well as temporally locating people for that week." She also used her online communication messages to convey appreciation and gratitude, thanking students for specific things that they had done recently in class, using writing as a tool to recognize the work that they were doing in ways that could contribute to their motivation to continue learning in the course. Rebecca also made the work that she was doing for students transparent, so that they could hopefully better see the structures in place for their learning: "I could use email to reinforce what labor was going into creating support for their learning." For these teachers, the most important uptake outcome was that the online communicative interaction for both teachers and students became more intentional and nuanced after the initial pandemic shift to online learning. Their uptake surrounding communicative interactions illustrates how, for some writing teachers, writing to students became an explicit mediational influence in their pedagogical thinking and practice.

For some participants, post-Spring 2020 online communicative interactions with students have changed as acts of teaching *and* as acts of writing. During my interview with Tessa, she realized something about her teaching that she didn't see there before, and she also changed how she incorporated technical writing practices for student audiences. Tessa started using Microsoft Teams at the beginning of the Spring 2020 semester, before the pandemic began, because she thought that this messaging tool seemed more friendly than email and allowed students to talk more easily and informally with their peers in an online space – something that she valued in her

writing pedagogy. Instead of learning something completely new about online communicative interactions and teaching, her experiences during the Spring 2020 semester made her realize how much the way she teaches "relies on collaborative work and timely communication--neither of which worked particularly well in Spring 2020." Examining her tool use not only showed her something explicit about her teaching, but also points to a specific reason why her online communicative interactions with students were such a struggle during a crisis because collaboration and timeliness were both so deeply interrupted. In relation to writing activity, Tessa explicitly mentions in her interview that she learned new technical writing practices since the Spring 2020 semester, including how (and why) to break up messages into smaller chunks and the importance of bolding keywords and phrases in longer messages or messages that have less immediate asks. According to Tessa, her improvements in writing skills helped students to better take up her messages on their side of the communicative interaction chain.

It's also important to note that, like learning, uptake is neither linear nor static. In addition to being divergent from others, people's uptake also changes over time–and has continued to change as we have each moved beyond our experiences of immediate crisis–also in divergent ways. A quote from Rebecca's interview sums up this kind of uptake change quite well: "But goddamn, I also fucking hate email as a primary activity that we're required to have access to every fucking day in order to function. But that's partly a work complaint, and partly an adulting one." Rebecca's feelings about using writing are still complex: it's both a valuable teaching tool, and also one that still requires a great deal of labor in capitalist university systems. For Daisy, her initial crisis messages in 2020 to students were full of empathetic language that was almost "lovey-dovey." She said that this was her version of emulating ISU's Writing Program Director Rachel Gramer's communication practices to acknowledge the human behind

the screen. However, she said that now her messages are almost void of empathetic language, and instead her messages to students "read like a machine," instructing students on what they need to do and reminders of responsibilities. In fact, Daisy feels as if her online communicative interactions to students are reverting back to what they looked like pre-pandemic. She shared that, somewhere along the way, she lost what she thought she gained and learned about online communicative interactions with students during the Spring 2020 semester. Like other instructors, Daisy is relieved to return to in-person teaching, in part because there is significant emotional labor involved in not only sending messages frequently, but also sending consistent messages and using those messages as a scaffolding for student learning. Daisy hopes that her empathetic language is shown in the classroom through oral communication with students, even if it is lacking in written communication to them. She still values empathetic support in her teaching, but she is delivering that teaching goal through a different modality.

Writing teachers' divergent uptake around certain writing practices is also not static because communicative interactions require response – in this case, from students, which also varies widely by semester, course, and specific people in the class. Daisy shared how there are still problems within her online communicative interactions with students: some students read and respond to her online messages while most students completely ignore them. She attests that "communication is NOT a one-way street – we can only give as much (or maybe a little more, as teachers) as we take." Daisy acknowledges here that there is perhaps more responsibility on the teacher to initiate and maintain communicative interactions between students and teachers, but that, for the system to be effective, both parties need to be active participants. Daisy's change in practice shows why teachers' divergent uptake can change over time: a lack of reciprocation,

which then has an impact on how teachers use online communicative interactions as teaching tools (if at all).

Certainly, like teachers' own divergent uptake with writing as a teaching tool, participants also described students' divergent uptake that they were seeing with how they responded (or didn't) to communicative interaction opportunities. Part of Rebecca's uptake involved learning not to take student responses to online messages personally: "One person might thank you for the same message that someone else will use as reason for complaint." And no matter how clear teachers try to be, some people might still have misunderstandings or disagreements. She said that some people appreciate the amount of detail that she puts into her messages, while others claim that they don't read her messages all the way through because they are too long. Rebecca reminds us that "while online messaging is one means of communication, it's never the only way." One part of Rebecca's uptake of online communication is to realize how we communicate is related to what we communicate. Perhaps for Daisy, then, communicating logistics in writing is now enough.

For Rebecca, in 2021, communicative interactions with students reminded her of what we know and don't know about each other as complex people–and how students communicate that using different modes. She illustrated this point by telling me that she has received online messages from students sharing "deeply personal struggles" that they don't ever mention in-person or during video calls. By contrast, other students have cried openly in front of Rebecca but then only sent a limited number of online messages in writing. Rebecca discusses how written communication to students really is writing, "which means it takes time, energy, focus, and concentration…it's goal-oriented and tool-oriented." Rebecca said that, through participating in my interview study and artifact collection, she realized "how important and powerful [written

communication to students] can be and how it's a tool that can be used for relational support and not just top-down commands." And like teachers, students experience divergent uptake of writing as this kind of tool in particular situations.

How have writing teachers' writing and teaching values and goals for communicative interactions with students changed since 2020?

One of the research threads that I am interested in about writing teachers' divergent uptake is how their responses communicate something about their writing and teaching values and goals. Some of the values that teachers emphasized as important in the Spring of 2020 were the same, but two major values appeared most often across results and became a focus of writing instructor's communicative interactions: clarity and support. I also want to be clear about what I mean in this section when I use "writing goals," "writing values," "teaching goals," and "teaching values." A writing *value* is something that the writer deems to be important and necessary for effective writing in a particular situation, whereas the writing *goal* is how the writer enacts their writing values toward a particular outcome for a particular piece of writing. Similarly, a teaching *value* is something that the instructor deems fundamental and essential for effective teaching in a particular course, while the teaching *goal* is how the instructor will put that value into practice to accomplish a particular outcome. These different values and goals may be similar, but they do not always overlap. I will be clear when analyzing the data in this section whether I consider something to be a teaching value or goal and/or a writing value or goal.

What clarity looks like for teacher-writers

Through analyzing the research data, I identified "clarity" as one of the major topics that instructors identified as a writing and teaching goal and value. For some instructors, clarity looked like accessibility and equitable opportunities for learning. One survey participant

mentioned that after the Spring 2020 semester, they began to think more critically about the clarity of their online messages and, more specifically, about the "balance between making all the course/assignment/content information available and presenting all that information in a way that is approachable and digestible (i.e., not overwhelming)." Another participant discussed how, especially during the initial immediate crisis of Spring 2020, this time of abnormal teaching required teachers to be more thoughtful about the messages that we were sending students: "It requires us to think more creatively about how to reach those who have different learning styles and capabilities." These two instructors used initial online communicative interactions as a pedagogical tool for teaching accessibility that can benefit students all of the time, not only in pandemic-affected semesters. Putting clarity to work toward accessibility can be seen as aligned with feminist pedagogies of using transparency in communication.

For other participants, clarity looked like writing instructors wanting their messages to be approachable and digestible for student comprehension. Instructors talked about conveying clear expectations of the class, including due dates, project and task reminders, and course schedule updates. One participant stated, "communicate clearly and consistently as a method of care" – their version of clarity was also a practice of support. The writing value of being clear and consistent and the teaching value of wanting students to easily comprehend and take up messages is aligned with TPC values as well as feminist writing teacher values. Honesty and transparency were two particular values that survey participants shared that helped them to be clear in messages. Honesty and transparency were both teaching values and writing values that they wanted to communicate to real audiences of students. But the goals they were working toward based on these values again demonstrates writing teachers' divergent uptake of even a seemingly singular value set. One survey participant illustrated why they find the writing and teaching

value of honesty to be so important in online communicative interactions with students: “Part of such strategy is also to open up my personality to them, to show that I am not afraid of being open, that I am not perfect...The main aim is to be sincere and human, which creates a wonderful rapport with the class for the semester to come as they are not intimidated by me or by the course.” This instructor’s intent for their online messages to students is to facilitate classroom community.

As I shared in the previous section, one way that participants demonstrated their teaching and writing value of clarity was to send more frequent and consistent messages. One instructor mentioned that they thought they had messaged students online frequently before the start of the pandemic, but that was not the case when that instructor looked back at their messages. Now, even when teaching an entirely in-person class, they write students messages much more frequently, with a similar structure: what to do immediately, what to do for the next class, and what the instructor is doing for students. This last section of “what I’m doing for you” was a new way of communicating to students that consisted of: “letting people know when I was revising a major writing assignment prompt; when I was giving them feedback on their writing; and when I had completed grading and returned grades on major writing projects.” The participant’s additions to their online communicative interactions with students are aligned with feminist TPC thinking about teacher-writers who seek to make labor visible, to chunk information for readers, and to use writing as a teaching tool to communicate not just information but also priorities for students’ writing while also trying to make everyone’s work seem clear and manageable.

While an excessive sending of messages to students may lead to confusion and misunderstanding, frequency of messages can also be used to achieve clarity when used appropriately in online communicative interactions. Writing teachers can use writing to avoid

overwhelming students with information that they cannot process. However, situational practices of writing instructors sending consistent messages at regular intervals can also help achieve the teaching goal of clarity. One survey participant discussed how the frequency of their messages balanced out in recent semesters as they have returned to more in-person classes where they can supplement their online communication with "in-person explanations, discussions, and Q&A." Similar to Tessa, this instructor is learning to put the value of clarity to work in multimodal ways that include, and exceed, written communication, in ways that align with Julie Hengst's work with communicative interactions that are not solely written. Another instructor revealed in the survey that, before the pandemic, they did not send much of anything to students online because of the time commitment it would take to compose online messages. When we entered emergency online learning, the instructor was then forced to send more online messages to students but still tried to keep them minimal so as to not overwhelm students. Similar to the other survey participants, after returning to in-person classes, they do not send many online messages to students. Divergent from Daisy, they do send more than they did pre-pandemic. They explain that they still do not send many online messages to students with the fear that these messages will be "ineffective" and that students will not read or engage with the online messages they send them. It's important for us to pay attention to how writing values can conflict with teaching goals, and even something as seemingly beneficial as clarity as a value is complex and has to be continually re-assessed in relation to other values and goals to support student learning.

What support looks like for teacher-writers

Many research participants shared that a major focus of their initial communicative interactions to students have been to offer support in ways that might include–and definitely also exceed–being clear. As I described in Chapter 3, initial crisis support had to be more focused on

the short term, even though in the long term we are still experiencing trauma and struggle. There is a difference between a "crisis sprint" and a "risk marathon." In 2020, instructors were adjusting to experiencing collective ongoing trauma interruption when we thought that it wasn't going to last beyond a couple of weeks or even a few months. While being affected by the trauma of a pandemic after Spring 2020, we also knew by then that we had to work through it and with it for longer than we initially ever imagined. So understandably, after the Spring 2020 semester, the concept of "support" was defined somewhat differently by participants. There were different kinds of support under this umbrella term because we were outside of the immediate crisis triage of Spring 2020.

For writing instructors beyond 2020, using writing to work toward the teaching goal of support could mean that they were providing students resources and materials to help them succeed in class, or that they were supporting students emotionally to help them succeed in their learning. One participant stated about their artifact from Spring 2021, "I wanted to validate their efforts at producing great writing in the previous weeks of the semester and to encourage them to be active in filling the mid-course survey" – this instructor was offering positive affirmations as emotional support for students. In a similar vein, another instructor mentioned that the writing goal of their artifact, sent in Fall 2021, was to not only provide students with information but to "also provide some sense of reassurance and structure" and "not add to their overwhelming stress and anxiety." However, working toward the teaching goal of creating a classroom rapport of calm was still difficult to do through writing during the ongoing pandemic. One instructor reflected on their time sending messages to students during the Fall of 2020, and stated that "Every couple weeks, writing one of these messages usually took me about two hours just to work through the panic to make sure that what I was writing was professional, helpful, and as

close to a balance of fair for both me and the students I worked with as I could get. Reading over it now, I'm thinking about how this message likely just made many of the students more anxious instead of helping them." Many writing instructors were attempting to still work toward supporting with an abundant amount of information (one of their teaching goals) and supporting with reassuring language (one of their writing goals). It's only now, looking back at written artifacts, that some teachers–and I–could see moments where these efforts to achieve multiple complex teaching and writing goals could just as easily fail or succeed under the unprecedented circumstances.

When I analyzed the artifact data, I saw numerous examples of how instructors were intentionally acknowledging the human side of things and providing emotional support through feelings of empathy for students. Some of these sentiments were congratulatory, such as: "We made it through Unit 1, congrats! You did it!" or "You've deserved a great break. You've done it! You've finished your first semester of college and it is a BIG deal! So, I hope you can celebrate it!" Some of the sentiments were sending positive thoughts to students: "Enjoy the little bits of warmer weather when you can!" or "Peace and much love to you all, and do what you gotta do this week to take care of yourselves." Some sentiments gave thanks to students: "THANK YOU to all of you who have already finished the survey and provided substantial answers! I appreciate it!" Overall, instructors wanted to show their appreciation for students who were continuing to work during a very difficult time. By instructors encouraging students via online communicative interactions, instructors are achieving their teaching goals of supporting student learning through writing.

Being more flexible with student struggles and communicating that through online communicative interactions was another way that writing teachers were supporting students. To

illustrate this point, one participant said that they "pay more conscious attention to the fact that there is not just a student I'm replying to, but a person who may be trying their very best to make it in situations that are far from ideal." Making flexibility a more integral part of teaching practices helps to get at why accessibility matters: because people struggle in ways that we do not fully have access to ourselves. Accessibility is then teacher-writer practice that can be woven into communicative interactions with students. In this way, the pandemic helped to remind instructors that they have individual students in their classrooms with their own histories, backgrounds, and intersectional identities.

Many participants noted that their examples of online communicative interactions illustrated their teaching goal of showing the "human" side of things. One instructor said that their message showed how transparent they were in their online communication with students and illustrated how important honesty is in teaching spaces in order to support students and their learning. Another instructor chose to share their artifact, sent in Fall 2020, because of the feedback that this message received. In this communicative interaction, the instructor tells students how they acknowledged how frustrating it was to continue to work and learn during a pandemic.They stated how many students responded with sentiments such as: "You're the only teacher that gets how we all feel right now," and "Others are just expecting us to push through everything like nothing's even happening." The participant said that looking at this message now reminds them that doing "something to maintain rigor doesn't just mean pushing through it, but letting off a bit when the circumstances require it." Another participant shared their artifact, sent in Spring 2021, because it also showed them being honest - in this case, telling students that the course was new to them and they were still working on filling in the ReggieNet platform with activities in order to support their learning in this class. When this participant was upfront about

how they were going to support students with writing activities, as well as being honest about when those methods of support would be available, the participant found that the students responded with patience and understanding. When an instructor values support in their teaching and in their writing, they are fostering a coalition, such as described by Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019), of reciprocal support and a more honest feminist classroom community.

For some participants, support looked like instructors becoming more intentional and structured in their online messages with students to provide all necessary information–and construct boundaries: "It also, strangely, has made me construct stronger boundaries around student communication. During the pandemic, because of the sheer volume of digital time, I ended up blocking emails to my phone outside of working hours, a strategy I have continued." In their survey response, the participant described how they balance online communicative interactions, deciding "what is 'okay' and what is 'not okay'" when determining the success or effectiveness of an online communicative interaction. For this instructor, using clarity for boundary setting helped them from feeling emotional burnout by providing clear expectations and establishing transparent consistency of how their online communicative interactions work for students.

Whether students were engaging in online communicative interactions with the instructor, many instructors still wanted to appear to have a sense of "togetherness" for students. However, the burnout from keeping up appearances weighed on instructors. One instructor wrote, "I feel like I sound more like a robot than a person. It makes me sad a little because I probably got fixated on being to-the-point in my mass emails during an async semester that I forgot these are people I'm communicating with." This participant explains some of the writing problems that they were having during their online communicative interactions with students.

They could recognize that they sounded robotic, even if that was not their intention and not in line with their writing values and goals. Another participant was surprised looking back at their message from Fall 2020, stating that they seem much more rigid than they remembered being. They wanted to be personable in their messages to students; however, after reflecting, they think that this message is lacking empathy and reads much more functional. They stated that the "functionable" emails were common because the class was being taught asynchronously online and they needed to be sure that everything was as clear as possible for students. In the Fall of 2020, when the English department at ISU was still online-only, online spaces were the only spaces to talk about grades with students. This instructor also expressed how the class in general was a struggle in the Fall of 2020, because of the amount of little moving parts and because the instructor did not intend for or anticipate their classes to be online. These two participants were so fixed on their teaching goal of clarity, getting to the point and being brief, that they lost their teaching goal of providing emotional support and encouragement for students. They were forgetting to treat people like humans. These writing missteps can lead to pedagogical consequences at any time, not only during a pandemic but any time when students are struggling. Even though a major writing goal for instructors was to support students through their messages, we also need to figure out how to work toward both academic support and human-to-human support to achieve our teaching goals.

Even though so many instructors wanted to give support to students, the initial communicative interaction messages were not always effective toward this teaching goal and were, of course, taken up unevenly by students–and responded to differently by teachers. For example, one participant mentioned that they wanted to send online messages to the entire class to provide tools for determining their current academic standing in the course because "I knew

many of them wouldn't meet with me on Zoom/Teams to discuss the grade [orally] and it was illegal for me to communicate with them about their grades through email/Teams chat messages [without written permission from the student in advance] and I couldn't meet with them in person." This reminds me of my own story of eventually canceling my informal Zoom meetings because no one was attending them. Communicative interactions between an instructor and a student are difficult when one party assumes or has an understanding that the other party is going to be engaging equally to work toward the same goals – or even assumes that there are shared goals for people across roles. In their survey response, a different participant noted: "When I saw an example of a language community 'in the wild,' I thought it was a fun thing to share with them. I have no recollection if any of the students actually clicked the hyperlink to see my example, but I was happy to share it." Sometimes online messages were not effective in being able to offer support as teachers wanted to: in some cases when we know the outcome, and in other cases when we just don't know.

What does "new normal" look like for teacher-writers now?

We continue to navigate our way through a world altered by COVID-19, and we acknowledge that our teaching has been impacted, to some extent, after the initial crisis moments. For many research study participants, some of the changes that they made to their writing and teaching goals in online communicative interactions with students have already become integrated into their teaching practices now.

When I asked writing instructors in 2022 about their comfort with online communication with students, instructors felt as if they were now more prepared to participate in communicative interactions and teach online after the onset of COVID-19. For example, one instructor mentions how they are always thinking about how their classroom activities and course projects could

easily be adapted to be taught online. They stated that "prior to the Spring 2020 shift to online learning, I hadn't used my [course management system] nearly so thoroughly as I did in subsequent semesters. I also retooled many of my assignment documents to continue working towards my clarity goal." Other instructors mention that they now, in some way, include online communication as part of their pedagogy and even sometimes as part of their grading system, rewarding students who participate in online communicative interactions.

For many writing instructors, their experiences writing to students were very embodied writing practices that shaped what teaching practices brought them comfort and confidence. One participant chose to share their particular message artifact because it was a good example of what became a "normal" practice within their teaching. The participant said that the message meant something to them in that it represented how "things can look highly organized and intentional–and be both of those things–AND also feel still bizarre and chaotic and dispreferred." The participant discussed how they did not hate teaching online but felt "incapable of being a very good teacher" then because of the stresses of world events and their struggles with mental health. With everything feeling so "abnormal and out of whack," they found comfort in the everyday routines that provided structure, support, and consistency. Writing instructors were changing their writing practices not just for students, but also for themselves.

Some participants described how their teaching and communication to students became a multimodal activity across time-space relying on more hybrid modalities: both in person and online. For example, a participant stated that now, almost all of the information regarding their class can be found online through their course management system and through email announcements. The face-to-face expectation is some in-person activities that are performed in class, but as the instructor notes, these activities could be easily adapted for online learning and

communication as well. For this instructor, the pandemic definitely seemed to shape the communicative interactions online with students, even after a return to in-person classes. Having participated in pandemic online teaching and a return to in-person and modified hybrid modalities, we can see how teaching is a literate activity that relies on both speaking and writing, with more nuanced attention to how writing is also a teaching and learning tool for both writing students *and* writing teachers. Previously, we may not have paid as much attention to what this looks like in our writing and what it feels like to practice in more everyday ways, rather than a message that is sent once a month or not at all.

When asked why they had chosen to share their particular post-Spring 2020 message, one instructor stated that their message was an example of what became a regular weekly occurrence in their class based on student feedback. Every week, the participant would send out a weekly "to-do" list that detailed what students needed to accomplish that week. The weekly email became a recurring part of the instructor's communicative system with students because of students asking for this particular type of instructor assistance. They had emailed students, asking them what they thought would be a helpful addition to the class, and many of them discussed a need for weekly reminders and updates to help keep them on track. The instructor agreed that this would be a helpful addition to her class and helped to emphasize their pedagogical values of being clear and consistent. Another participant chose a message that represented a "normal" message that they would send to students on a regular, weekly basis. The instructor states that they improved the formatting of these messages each semester to make them more digestible and understandable for students so that they could read over the information that was important to them. Again in this situation, students' feedback influenced how instructors proceeded in their online communicative interactions with students. Working to build effective

learning environments through online communicative interactions between teachers and students, writing instructors are using writing to work toward teaching goals, which is a shift from how many were using writing as teachers before the pandemic.

In this chapter, I have shared how I see writing instructors' divergent uptake during pandemic-affected and subsequent semesters and how people's writing and teaching goals and values are mediated by each other–and by the student audiences we communicate with. In the next and final chapter, I share insight, based on my research and data analysis for this dissertation, into how to make online communicative interactions with students meaningful and valuable as tools when we are teaching writing.

CHAPTER V: USING ONLINE COMMUNICATIVE INTERACTIONS RESEARCH TO SUPPORT WRITING TEACHERS AS WRITERS

In 2023, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are still being felt by instructors, students, and all humans. The first-year students that writing instructors are interacting with this Fall in writing courses are people who went through the majority of their high school career mitigating varying degrees of pandemic risk and experiencing mixtures of in-person, online, and hybrid education. The effects that the pandemic has had on student learning development is something that we are all still trying to understand and unpack. Dorn et al (2021), Mazrekaj and De Witte, (2023), and Bonacini, Gallo, and Patriarca (2023) are just three examples of numerous research studies and articles on COVID-19's long term effects on student learning. The writing instructors who have been teaching over the last three years have also gone through disturbances in teaching, learning, and developing different modes and methods of teaching. And over the past three years, everyone has been affected emotionally as humans – the long-lasting effects of which we are also still unpacking and comprehending today (O'Connor et al, 2021; Hagen et al, 2023). From the deaths of loved ones and strangers to political upheaval, from drastic changes in day-to-day living and work to increasing struggles with mental illness – the emotional toll of the COVID-19 crisis and subsequent years of risk and consequence are still with us. The pandemic is not yet over.

But we are still here, too, teaching, learning, and practicing writing. So how can we use what we have learned? What generative takeaways can we find from these particular times of crisis and uncertainty? In this dissertation, I have illuminated how, even though writing teacher

participants were not practiced in crisis communication and had not been taught explicitly how to engage with students effectively in online communicative interactions, we persevered. We not only figured out what our writing values and goals were for our online messages to students, but also determined how our writing goals could align with our teaching goals and values. We began using online communicative interactions as tools for teaching and learning – both when online learning and communication was the only option and when classes began to resume an in-person format. With further understanding of writing as a teaching tool, as writing teachers, we can learn how to use online communicative interactions effectively to align with our evolving pedagogical practices.

This concluding chapter is shared in three sections:

- What do research participants suggest could support teacher-writers in being successful and confident in online communicative interactions?
- How can we work toward research-informed improvements surrounding online communicative interactions by triangulating our experiences with existing research and structures of support?
- As a writing teacher and teacher researcher, where do I see a place to start to encourage thoughtful writing teacher online communicative interactions with writing students?

In this first section, I share what interview participants suggest would be helpful ways of supporting teachers to write in ways that we have not before, or have had no explicit instruction in. In the next section, I weave together artifacts from this study and existing research and structures of support to suggest some research-informed areas for improved support for/and communicative interactions. Finally, I provide one possible place to start: with an infographic as

one artifact we can use as a writing research tool to treat our online communicative interactions as objects of/for writing research and teaching professional development to make our writing and teaching goals visible in order to hope to change them for the better.

What study research participants suggest to support teacher-writers in online communicative interactions

The last question that I asked interview participants pertained to the future of online communicative interactions with students and how we could better help prepare new writing teachers to take advantage of using online messages to students as a teaching tool. While participants agreed that something should be done to better prepare writing teachers to communicate with students online, teachers' uptake once again diverged about what would be most useful: sample texts and tools, professional development with peer conversation, or actual student feedback.

Bella suggests that providing new writing instructors with message templates and examples would be helpful. Her argument is that seeing examples of online communication helped her to better understand what she should include and not include in online messages and what messages to students should look like. Mia suggests that having specific examples would be helpful for new teachers, too, especially those who have never interacted with students online at all as writing teachers. Mia also suggests that seeing how other writing instructors have used online communicative interaction tools would help her to have a better understanding of online communication options. Mia said that, in addition to examples, giving writing teachers information on using different platforms such as Zoom, email, and Padlet would be helpful so that writing teachers could practice with different writing tools and modes. Whether working

with sample texts or suggested tools, Mia advocates for the importance of thinking about how to be creative and try new things when teaching and communicating with writing students online.

Edward suggests that we still need some sort of teaching professional development seminar to instruct writing teachers on online teaching techniques and digital tools, including online communicating with writing students and, I would add, using writing as a teaching tool. Edward suggested that COVID-19 illuminated some "cracks in our educational spaces" for writing instructors who do not know how to incorporate effective online teaching tools into writing classes. He stated that, because some instructors were used to teaching in traditional in-person classes, we were lacking the skills and knowledge to use online teaching spaces. Tessa also suggested that, through teaching professional development sessions, writing teachers could learn how to better communicate with and teach students in online spaces. Extending Mia's suggestions of what would be helpful, Tessa suggests showing teachers what different types of digital writing spaces are available to them and offering instruction on how we can use digital tools as effective tools to teach writing. In addition, Tessa–who learned a lot about technical writing during the initial COVID-impacted semester–says that we also need instruction in how to use length, content, and formatting of digital communications to make messages more accessible to students.

Just as importantly, Tessa argues for peer conversation as a part of teacher professional development. In a structured professional development setting, writing teachers can ask questions and receive feedback from other writing instructors about what works and what doesn't work in our online communicative interactions. Above all, Tessa argues that it is important to have "explicit conversations" about what our teaching goals are with digital tools, which can help writing teachers to better understand how to accomplish our teaching goals. And,

as I have argued in this dissertation, the teaching goals are not the only goals that matter–and they cannot be accomplished in writing without clearer writing goals, too. Articulating writing *and* teaching values can help to establish what our writing *and* teaching goals are–and how we can accomplish them through online communicative interactions with writing students.

Rather than focusing on sample texts, tool suggestions, or professional development, Daisy stated that writing instructors should tailor how we use communication tools and enact communication practices based on feedback from our actual readers: writing students. She suggested that the most helpful strategy for her was to send out a survey or poll to students to ask them about their reading behaviors and varying preferences for communication. For Daisy, including student feedback surveys helps her as a teacher because she often gets set in her ways of doing something and sometimes needs that extra nudge to try something different in her teaching practices. Of course, Daisy is not alone in how sometimes, as writing teachers, we can become comfortable with how we are using certain writing tools or practices in our teaching, acting as if "one size fits all" or one practice works for students over a number of years even when we do so inadvertently, when often that is not the case. Like Daisy, Bella also argues that writing teachers should send out surveys about communication practices to students but also said that having a template–or, again, sample texts–for this survey with example questions would be helpful as well, combining methods of support with both sample texts and student feedback.

Collectively, participants' suggestions can all work together as something that the ISU Writing Program–and many other writing programs in and beyond the US–practice: genre research. Rebecca argues that giving instructors "here, do this now" kind of advice is not as valuable or useful for instructors in the long term – especially if the type of instruction can be found online for different writing situations (how to write an email, for example). She also

argues that one-off teaching professional development sessions do not work for everyone. During her interview, Rebecca said, through engaging with my research project, she began to have a better understanding of online communicative interactions with students as a teacher writing practice. By looking back and collecting message artifacts and contemplating the questions posed in the survey and the interview, Rebecca saw how she used online communication as a teaching tool pre-pandemic and how her online communication changed after the onset of COVID-19. Rebecca argues, "I would say what I say about any and every kind of writing: when you want to know more, learn more, talk about this more--do the genre research. Find the texts that real people are writing, right now, in the world. Ask some questions about them. Talk about those questions with other people. Answer the questions with other people. And then see what your new questions are, as well as how those answers can influence your practice." Taken together, participant suggestions mirror genre research methods that we practice in the ISU Writing Program with first-year writing students: collecting sample texts, investigating available tools, showing up for explicit instruction, having structured conversations with peers about writing, and getting actual reader feedback on what we have written and how people are experiencing our communication.

One vital aspect of doing genre research as writing teachers that many participants talked and wrote about throughout this project is to consider the role of our antecedent experience. One helpful place to start is to pay close attention to how we are already practicing online communication using particular tools. Consider how we are already writing, both to students and others, in online spaces. Think about how people are communicating with us in the workplace using online messaging. Then, when thinking about our own online communicative interactions, examine and articulate what we value in interaction, what kinds of writing and teaching goals we

are hoping to accomplish, and how we can accomplish those goals with students through writing. Rebecca suggests, as a possible first step, collecting previous online messages that we have each sent students and creating a word cloud with them to see what stands out to us that we did not see before. It's also important to recognize that our antecedent experience isn't always helpful and doesn't transfer automatically or always successfully to new situations. Edward, Daisy, and Bella all mentioned that writing instructors need guidance to think differently about online communicative interactions and how they are different from in-person, traditional teaching in ways that include and exceed focusing only on digital tools or specific pandemic reasons for digital writing. Specifically, Mia stated that writing instructors need to learn how to transfer how they interact with students in-person to online communicative interactions, something that also requires, as Tessa said, "explicit conversations."

For the writing instructors I interviewed, even so much as bringing up *how* online communicative interactions are different from in-person interactions and thinking about *how* to communicate in those spaces effectively is a vital start. But above all, regardless of how we start, the most important starting stance is to see writing to students as teaching *and* as professional everyday writing. We need to think about, talk about, and act like we are writers in relation to students, and, as Rebecca puts it, "not just teachers of other kinds of 'academic' writing that we are somehow 'transmitting' to students through speaking alone, or through formal written teacherly genres (like assignment sheets and syllabi) only."

Taken together, stepping through these interactive genre research steps to learn more about how we're participating in online communicative interactions with writing students is one way that writing teachers can increase our sense of confidence about our professional writing practices as teachers. During the initial COVID-impacted semester of Spring 2020, we might

have been more confident teacher-writers if we had already been equipped with texts, tools, instruction, conversation, feedback loops, resources, and mentoring about how to transfer our antecedent knowledge and experience to be more successful in online communicative interactions. And we still need that confidence as writing teachers with students now–in the same ways, and for the same reasons, that as writing teachers we want students to be more confident writers, too.

Triangulating experience with existing research and structures of support

Writing teachers experienced pedagogical uncertainty during Spring 2020 because many of us did not have writing confidence in our communicative interactions toolkit when the shift to online pandemic teaching began. As writing teachers writing to and for writing students, we can learn from existing cross-disciplinary technical and professional communication (TPC) research about written communication. Just as importantly, as writing programs supporting writing teachers, we should also infuse TPC-informed changes into existing writing program structures of support to help writing teachers feel more prepared to write online messages to students.

Feminist technical writing skills for writing teachers

I shared some existing TPC research in Chapter 3 that could help writing instructors be more confident and prepared to communicate with students. Specifically, I turned to Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) for how they argue for the importance of social justice TPC to build coalitions, Carolyn Miller (1979) for how to make TPC a humanistic practice, and Dragga and Voss (2001) for how to compose ethical TPC multimodal texts. TPC scholars Jared S. Colton and Steve Holmes (2018) argue for feminist ideologies for writing technical communication messages in order to understand how to avoid sexism, racism, ableism, ageism, and other prejudices in our written communication, as well as how to be more aware of the human

experience of multiply-marginalized stakeholders (p. 5). Colton and Holmes argue that technical writing communicators must constantly cultivate and reevaluate our writing practices in order to practice real forms of active feminism (p. 25). To enhance our pedagogical online communication skills, writing instructors need to recognize and consider our audiences of students as multiply-marginalized stakeholders and write to them in ways that are going to support their varying and divergent needs. Relying on existing feminist TPC research about professional and technical writing, writing teachers can better learn to compose successful online messages to students all of the time, not only in crisis. This isn't a matter of guessing what strategies are, but turning to those with research-grounded expertise in TPC for suggestions that pre-existed and have emerged since the COVID pandemic. Therefore, we can engage in a cross-disciplinary approach that writing program administration and writing teacher education would be wise to rely on more often in our areas of practice in writing programs.

Aligned with feminist TPC research and practice, it's important to remember that multiply marginalized students need empathy during a crisis–and that empathy also requires labor from teachers who also need empathy, as I also shared in more detail in Chapter 3, and are often multiply marginalized (and, in the case of this study, graduate students as well). As Sheppard (2020) analyzed in her research on how writing teachers felt about communicating with students online during the initial COVID-impacted semester, teachers were already starting to begin to feel the effects of communication burnout. From the data I collected, a participant stated that she felt that the communication was "relentless" and that even though she felt that weekly messages would be helpful for her if she was a student, "it felt difficult to accurately gauge student feedback on this aspect of the course, even when they did respond to periodic surveys." This is similar to Sheppard's findings in 2020 when instructors expressed a "vast

increase" (p. 64) in student online communication and when over a third of Sheppard's research participants felt "overwhelmed and burnout" (p. 63) while always having to be on-call for whenever students need them. Many of the instructors who participated in my study mentioned feeling tired or burnt out when thinking about communicating with students online, even after the initial pandemic-affected semester. To illustrate this point, one participant in this study said, "It makes me tired thinking about and remembering how much work it was to maintain this level of organization and shit-togetherness each week." The mental toll that so much online communicative interactions had was still affecting instructors as we navigated through the subsequent semesters.

So what might feminist technical writing skills as writing teachers look like in ways that attend to students' embodiment as well as our own? We can start by looking at existing online messages to determine how to build upon teachers' antecedent experience, and we can start small with particular units within our initial communicative interaction messages, like our efforts to "reach out." In the artifacts that instructors sent to students during Spring 2020, many of the messages included asking students to reach out to writing teachers with any questions or concerns. Such suggestions for students to reach out were usually somewhere in the conclusion of writing teachers' online messages:

- "Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns."
- "If you are feeling any (or all) of this as well and are becoming concerned about your ability to keep up with things, please do not hesitate to reach out."
- "If I can't provide what you need, I can help you get in touch with the people, resources, and support that can. Please let me know if you have any questions, concerns, etc."

- "Please email me and let me know if you would like to meet."
- "Please, do not hesitate to write to me and just tell me how you are doing, what you think about our next portion of the course, ask questions you have, etc."
- "Let me know if you have any questions, but until then, stay safe and be kind to yourselves!"
- "As always, feel free to send me questions and concerns, and I will do my best to answer them."

When analyzing messages from Fall 2020-Spring 2022, I found similar sentences in the conclusions of initial online communicative interaction messages requesting that students reach out to them if they would like to participate beyond the initial message. Here are a few examples of this type of communication from later artifacts:

- "If you have any questions or things you need to succeed in the course, please don't hesitate to reach out!"
- "If you are missing a lot and are overwhelmed about how to catch up, please reach out and we may be able to modify some assignments to make them more doable."
- "Feel free to email me with any questions."

Extending this trend of reminding students to reach out if they need anything in the semesters following the initial COVID-impacted semester, many instructors continue the emphasis on the student to reach out if they have any questions. While I am certain that instructors meant well with these statements, students might not respond to these requests in the ways that we anticipate. Some students may have an understanding that they *can* reach out to the instructor, but the knowledge that they *can* reach out does not mean that they know *how* to reach

out with their needs. Students might not know how to articulate their needs for online or in-person learning, especially when many of them have never had a dedicated writing class before. And as first-year college students, they likely do not fully understand what resources to ask for that would be helpful to them because they literally do not know what resources are available. If writing teachers' initial online communicative interaction messages were refracted through a research-informed understanding of feminist technical writing skills, how else could instructors write online messages not only to use them as a way to distribute information but also to provide equitable educational support for all students?

Just as importantly is this question: how can we each start small? Writing instructors can begin to use TPC writing skills in our messages in order to reach our writing and teaching goals of clarity, such as chunking information and having an intentional order to the information given. For instance, if reaching out is important, why leave it until last, just because that's a genre convention we have seen and participated in previously? We could also include TPC visual components to make information clear, such as putting important information in a bold font or highlighted, using bullet points and lists, adding internal headings, and creating accurate subject lines. To do this, writing teachers can build on existing structures that we are familiar with. For example, we might be using some TPC writing skills and features in other genres that we write as teacher-writers, such as writing assignment prompts, schedules, and course syllabi. In explicit conversation with peers and mentors, we can find ways to explicitly use our existing knowledge and apply it to online communicative interaction message writing with students.

Of course, writing instructors can face obstacles in our feminist technical writing skills by making assumptions about what students know and don't know, so it is important to address people's unfamiliarity with learning needs and learning resources. Based on our own writing and

our teaching writing experiences, we have come to know moments when people struggle with learning–and how to help them. For example, pre-pandemic, writing instructors at ISU included links to student support websites in their syllabi, as provided by the writing program. In online messages to students, writing instructors could refer to their syllabus to lead students to on-campus support that they might need, relying on existing structures of university support that already exist in writing (in course syllabi and university office websites). We could also–and did–write individual messages to students we knew were struggling, suggesting specific priorities to focus on or offering specific resources on concepts they seemed confused on. This is an example of how writing teachers already used our teaching experience to work toward feminist pedagogical practice through writing.

This was all of particular importance for first-year and any-year students who were struggling as multiply-marginalized college students in our courses during COVID-impacted semesters. As I shared in Chapter 3, many students were anxious about their academic standing and might feel nervous reaching out to instructors about their confusion or about their struggles in the class. Students were having difficulties adjusting to college life as first-generation college students or because they were physically away from their structures of support at home or on campus. They were also overwhelmed with work, both in their academic studies and any part-time work that they needed to help support themselves or their families financially. And they struggled with learning during interrupted educational situations across multiple shifting modalities and uneven experiences with supportive schooling. But these real-life writing student situations are not particular to pandemic times. They happen all the time. So it is important for us, as teacher-writers who need to practice feminist technical writing skills to support student

writers as complex people, to make action-oriented suggestions for students to do to succeed, rather than making students come up with them each time.

There are many other "start small" strategies that we can use and adapt to explicitly practice feminist technical writing as writing teachers. We can make lists, rather than leaving question marks. We can have separate messages about resources, rather than one line at the end of one message or at the end of the semester. Since Spring 2020, ISU Writing Program Director Rachel Gramer has sent messages throughout each semester with specific language for how to support students who are struggling (at midterm and nearing the end of the semester) and ways for teachers to support them (using university care reports, or communicating grades and attendance for those in danger of failing a required writing course, among others). Writing teachers can use messages from program administrators as kairotic opportunities to communicate with classes about specific items, not just weekly calls to "reach out." We can also compose a separate message about specific resources (messages we can save and revise for each semester!), rather than linking to a long syllabus document with a list of university websites or adding a list at the end of a weekly message that students might not even read all the way to the end. After sending such messages to an entire class, when we don't hear back from students in precarious positions in the course, we can also reach out to them with resources that align with our concerns for their course participation. As writing instructors, we can cultivate alternative options to online communicative interaction messages in order to reevaluate what we write (topic or focus), when we communicate (in the semester), how we organize our communication (order of items), and to whom we send our online messages (individual students, whole class).

Writing instructors can also start small by providing explicit direction to students in how to continue the communicative interaction in ways that might continue the chain beyond one

message. This is another apt way that teacher-writers can practice feminist technical writing skills. One participant in their online message artifact from Spring 2020 asked specifically for the type of reply that they were looking for in that specific message: "Lastly: Reply with an email or message that you got this (just a quick "Got it!" will do)...Look for more throughout the week, and stay safe & healthy, *mes amies*." The instructor includes an actionable item to do in this correspondence. By the instructor explicitly asking students to respond to their message and encouraging a back-and-forth low-stakes conversation, students might know more clearly how to participate in this communicative interaction chain. Another participant, in their message from Spring 2021, was clear in exactly how they wanted students to respond to their initial message by including a survey for students to complete. The survey asked students for feedback about how the class was structured and asked guided questions about what would help them to feel more confident in their learning. If it were framed as a feedback tool about teacher-student written communication practices, the survey could have also been the kind of tool that research participants, such as Tessa and Bella, suggested would help them as teacher-writers. As writing teachers, we can gather information about what would be most helpful to students in online communicative interaction spaces by asking students themselves. This could be accomplished through surveys, asking specific questions about student learning and uptake of online messages. This would help us to craft messages to students that support student learning and also help to elicit responses from students in writing.

Supporting feminist technical writing skills in writing programs

For writing teachers to practice more effective online communicative interaction with students, writing programs should offer explicit support to both new and returning writing teachers in ways that rely on an infusion model, working within all existing program structures

of support: generating conversation through professional development, peer mentoring, new writing teacher education (graduate writing pedagogy courses and program orientations)--all of which are sites for sharing teacher-writer created artifacts meant for students. And like teachers, programs can start small, too, taking a writing studies and writing research approach to supporting teachers as writers.

Writing programs could use online communicative interaction messages as a teaching tool through existing professional development structures. We could offer specific sessions on online communicative interactions with example artifacts from current writing teachers. For example, the ISU Writing Program has a teacher-led professional development day for all writing teachers before the start of each semester. A writing teacher (or administrator, depending on program structure) could lead one session talking about how their trajectory of writing online messages to students has developed, what they value in writing messages, and how they accomplish teaching goals through their messages. Similarly, a writing teacher (or administrator) could lead one workshop where participants bring our own messages to students from particular times in the semester (welcome announcement, midterm grades, end of semester, sharing resources) and use online communicative interactions as a set of tools to analyze and revise our own messages. Either way, explicit conversations about writing to students can be illuminating for all to share our own experiences using online messages as teaching tools, offering space for writing teachers to ask questions and generate ideas about using our writing values and goals to accomplish our teaching values and goals.

Writing programs can also integrate conversations about using online communicative interactions as teaching tools into existing peer mentoring structures for new and returning teachers. In the ISU Writing Program, new writing teachers participate in peer mentoring every

time they teach a new writing course. For new first-year writing teachers, cohorts meet weekly with an experienced writing teacher mentor. Writing to/for students through other genres (prompts, schedules) is already part of the cohort schedule in teachers' first semester. Those peer mentoring conversations could also start small by including writing to students in other genres like online messages to whole classes and individual students. For returning instructors, who may participate in group or individual peer mentoring, the same conversation could be useful. Specifically, peer mentors could work with teachers to co-create effective feminist TPC messages for students and practice such skills together. In these spaces, teachers would have even smaller groups of peer support than at whole program events, so that they have even more space to talk about using online messages to students as teaching tools and why this matters for first-year students in particular.

Finally, to more fully support new teachers specifically, writing programs can start small within other existing structures for writing teacher education, including graduate writing pedagogy courses and program orientations. At ISU, we use these structures to introduce teachers to the kinds of texts they will be writing for students and teaching students to produce, too. This is particularly important work given that new writing teachers are graduate students new to our graduate program too, and many of them can be new to teaching college writing in a US university and want explicit support in the cultural norms and expectations of the program, university, and students. In graduate writing pedagogy courses, faculty could use existing structures within the course. We could ask people to read research from TPC scholars about technical writing skills teachers can adapt and use, writing studies research about articulating writing values and goals, and education research about articulating teaching values and goals. We could also integrate producing online messages for students into existing or new course

projects, including the full course plan of documents that ISU teachers are asked to produce as part of the course. Even before that, during program orientation before the semester begins, we could offer one session on online messages as available teaching and learning tools, starting small by introducing the concept to those who might not consider writing messages to students a vital part of teaching activity (as in Sheppard's research).

Regardless of what existing structure programs use, it's most important to find multiple ways to share actual teacher-writer artifacts created for students in whatever program we're teaching in. In 2023, in the ISU Writing Program, the program team (faculty director, staff assistant director, and 6 doctoral students across areas of English Studies) structured orientation sessions around specific kinds of texts that teachers have to write for students. While the planning and preparation for such a structure took a great deal of labor, it made visible that teachers are writers for student audiences in ways that are an integral part of teaching college writing. A doctoral student mentor on the team, Nichol Brown, used course plan artifacts from the previous year's graduate writing pedagogy course to curate sample teacher texts from first-year teachers in the program: customized course descriptions, writing project overviews, writing project prompts (or assignment sheets), writing project schedules, and daily plans. After getting permission from teachers to share their artifacts with new writing teachers the next year, Nichol and program director Rachel Gramer also created infographic artifacts to accompany these sample texts, making sure to provide guided support on the kind of writing research we ask teachers to teach first-year writing students: defining each genre, articulating why it matters, giving some genre conventions, listing what items people often include, and creating a list of questions for teachers to answer themselves as they are creating texts in each genre. They then structured sessions around each of the teaching texts, sharing the artifacts and having time for

peer conversation and questions. This is just one example of multiple places to start small: collecting artifacts, creating artifacts, and/or giving time-space for teachers to process artifacts.

However, for the ISU Writing Program, the list of teaching texts made visible in 2023 did not include online messages written by teachers for students. But it could have–and could next year. And while such artifact sharing relies on new teacher artifacts for new teacher support, writing programs could also model the methods in this dissertation project, collecting online message artifacts as an entry point for conversations across existing structures (professional development, mentoring, coursework, orientation). In any case, programs can curate sample teaching texts and create accompanying support texts to share with new and/or all writing teachers as an entry point of conversation and writing our own messages to students. This sharing does not have to be limited to during program events, but can also be distributed using program listservs, program course management sites, and program websites for increased teacher accessibility and use.

An example tool for framing online communicative interactions with students as a teaching tool

I conclude this chapter with one example of starting small. I have composed an accompanying teaching text as an infographic (figures 4 and 5) that introduces online messages as teaching and learning tools for any writing teacher (new or not). I can envision this text being used during program professional development, as a starting conversation in peer mentoring, as part of a program orientation, or shared through program resource sites.

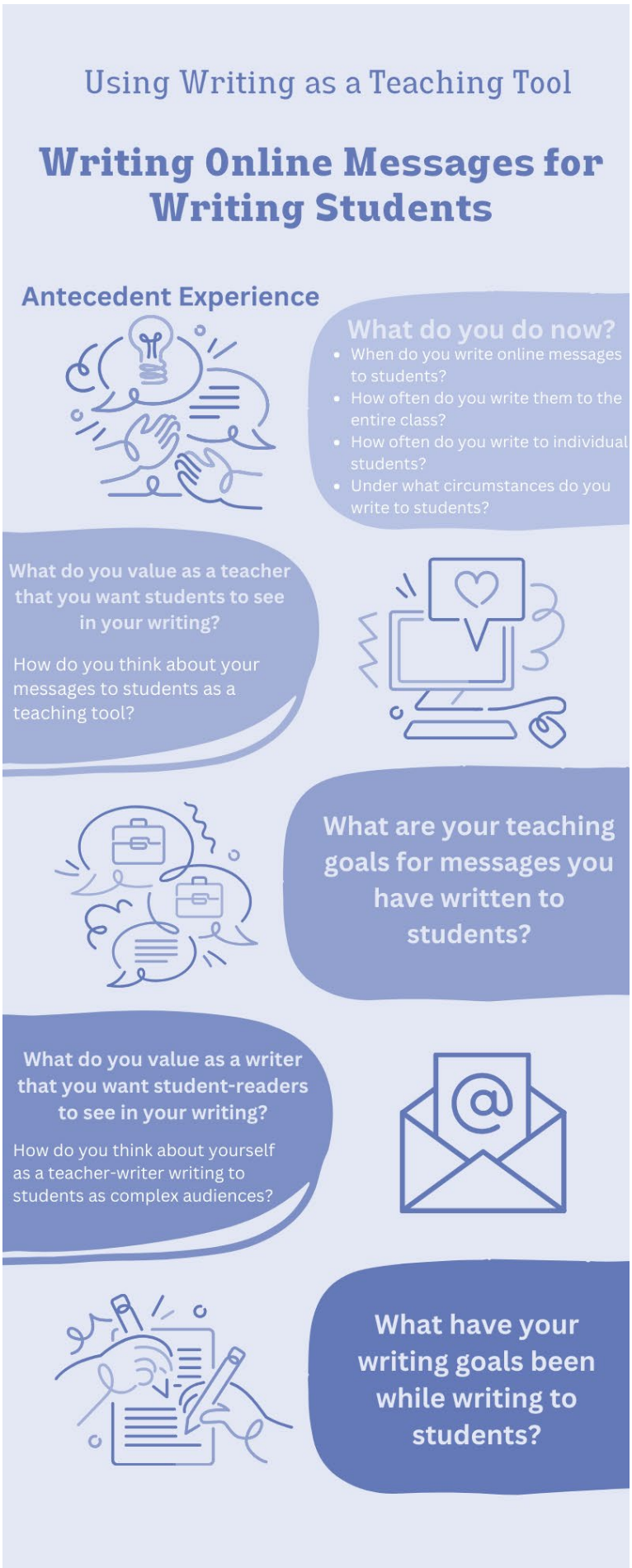

Figure 4 - Infographic, Front Side

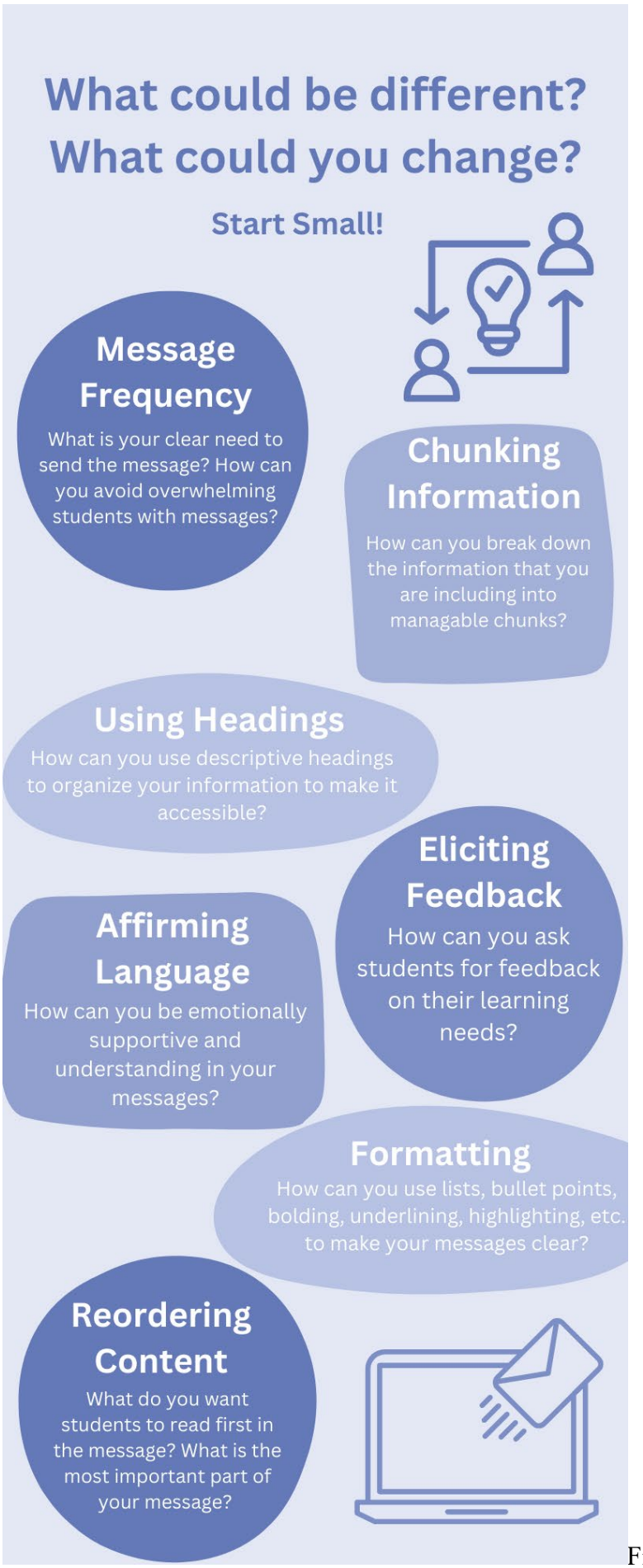

Figure 5 - Infographic, Back Side

The infographic introduces the topic of using online communicative interactions as a teaching tool because it is a topic that instructors might not have considered previously.

1. The infographic first asks teachers to think about how they use online messaging to students now, prompting teachers to analyze their use (or lack thereof) of this teaching tool.
2. Then the infographic asks the audience to consider what they value in their teaching when they are composing messages to students. Connecting this question to the first posed in the infographic, writing teachers can begin to think about how they are accomplishing (or not) those teaching values and goals in their messages now.
3. Similarly, the third question also asks teachers to consider what their writing values are while composing online messages to students, prompting them to think about how they are (or not) incorporating those writing goals now. These two questions about values and goals can be a way for writing teachers to brainstorm and define what they *do* value in their writing and teaching to students in online communicative interactions and *how* they can incorporate those values into teaching goals.
4. Finally, the back side of the infographic encourages writing instructors to start small while giving actionable items about how to do so. Small changes can help us do a little bit more to help support students in their academic journey – and that is progress. Changing writing and teaching practices can be a daunting task, so making the changes smaller and manageable makes them more likely to be incorporated. Whether someone is new to teaching college writing or they have been teaching for many years, we can all take steps towards change.

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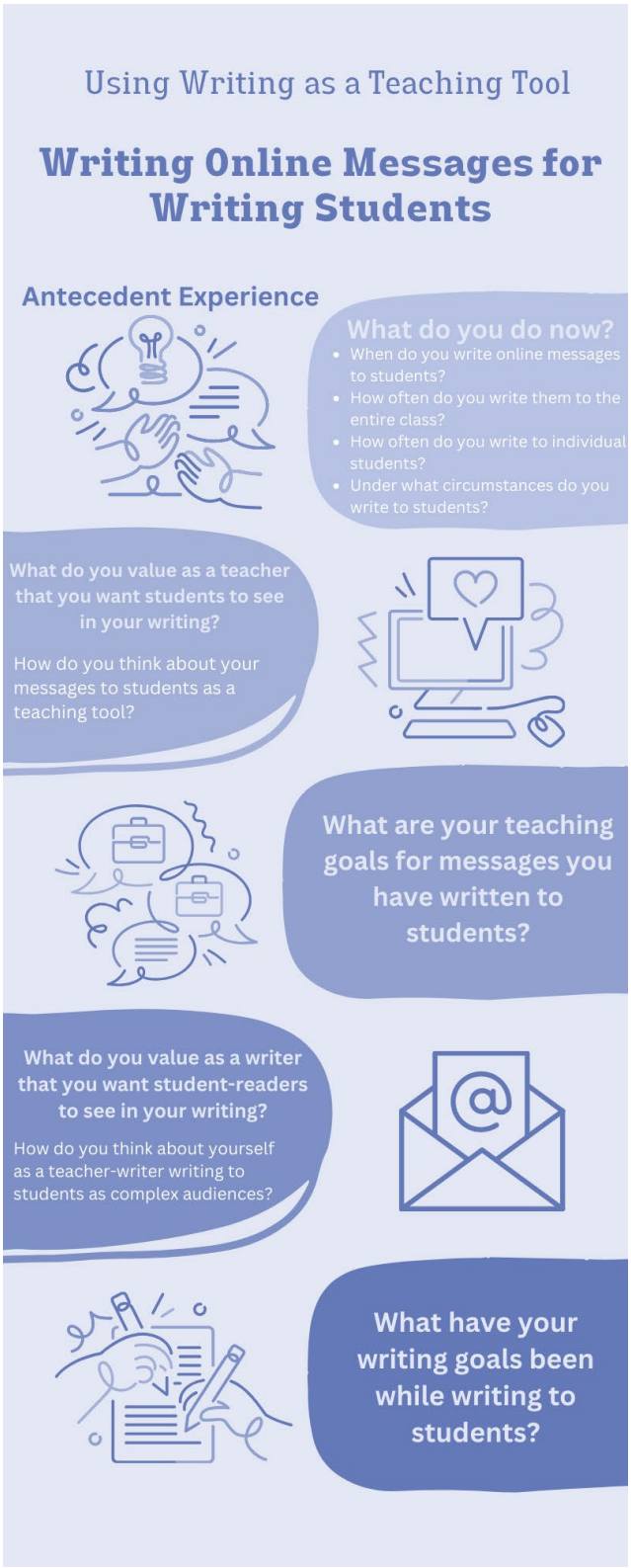
APPENDIX A - INFOGRAPHIC



What could be different? What could you change?

Start Small!

Message Frequency

What is your clear need to send the message? How can you avoid overwhelming students with messages?

Chunking Information

How can you break down the information that you are including into managable chunks?

Using Headings

How can you use descriptive headings to organize your information to make it accessible?

Eliciting Feedback

How can you ask students for feedback on their learning needs?

Affirming Language

How can you be emotionally supportive and understanding in your messages?

Formatting

How can you use lists, bullet points, bolding, underlining, highlighting, etc. to make your messages clear?

Reordering Content

What do you want students to read first in the message? What is the most important part of your message?

APPENDIX B - SURVEY QUESTIONS

Q1 What ISU writing classes did you teach from Spring 2020 to Spring 2022?

Q2 During Spring 2020, when ISU instructors switched to online teaching mid-semester, what tools did you use to communicate with students? Did you use ISU's Outlook email, ReggieNet Announcements, Slack, Discord, or others?

Q3 Did you communicate regularly with students using this tool? If so, how often? How did you decide when to communicate with students?

Q4 Please upload, or copy and paste, an online message you sent to students in Spring 2020, during the sudden shift to online instruction. Please be sure to remove all information that may identify you (including name, section number, email sign-off or signature, etc.)

Q5 What were your main goals when writing this message?

Q6 How did you feel when you were composing this message? Or, if you don't recall, how do you feel when you read over it now?

Q7 Please upload, or copy and paste, an online message you sent to students during a different semester during COVID-19: Fall 2020, Spring 2021, Fall 2021, or Spring 2022. Please be sure to remove all information that may identify you (including name, section number, email sign-off or signature, etc.)

Q8 Why have you chosen this message? What does this message mean to you?

Q9 What was the modality of your class as you sent this message? (i.e. online, in-person, hybrid, etc.)

Q10 What were your main goals when writing this message?

Q11 How did you feel when you were composing this message? Or, if you don't recall, how do you feel when you read over it now?

Q12 When you communicate with students, what do you value as an instructor?

Q13 What, if anything, do you remember about how students responded to your online communication to them during/since COVID-19 and shifts in instructional modalities at ISU?

Q14 How do you think the way you communicate with students in online messaging has changed during COVID-19 and shifts in instructional modalities at ISU?

Q15 How would you say you learned to communicate with students with online messaging tools? Were you taught explicitly? Did you have models in the workplace? Did you ask peers?

Q16 If you are willing to discuss the topics in this survey further with me in an interview, please fill out this additional survey:

APPENDIX C - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Section 1: Communicating with Students

1. Describe your online communication with students.
2. What are you teaching goals for online communication?
3. How do you navigate communicating with students who are struggling and/or from marginalized groups?
4. How would you say you learned to communicate with students with online messaging tools? Were you taught explicitly? Did you have models in the workplace? Did you ask peers?

Section 2: COVID-19 Experiences

1. Can you talk a little bit about your experience as an individual during the Spring 2020 semester?
2. Can you tell me a story or about an experience communicating with students who were struggling during COVID?
3. In general, how did you prepare to make this transition? What do you remember as being helpful to you as an instructor?

Section 3: Artifact #1 from Spring 2020

Before this interview, you completed a survey that included an online message example from Spring 2020. Together during the interview, we'll discuss your experiences with the message you shared; and see if you want to add, clarify, or elaborate on your survey responses.

1. Why did you choose this specific communication tool (ISU Outlook email, personal email, ReggieNet announcement, Slack, Discord, etc.) to engage with students?

2. On average, how much time did you spend messaging students after the shift to online teaching?

3. How did it feel to be communicating with students online so suddenly as the only or primary way of being able to communicate with them?

4. How was writing this online message different from your past experiences communicating with students as a teacher?

5. When composing this message, what was helpful to you? What was the least helpful to you?

6. What was surprising to you when you were composing this message? What is surprising to you looking at it now?

7. What do you remember about how students responded to your online messages during this semester?

8. Looking at this message now, two years later, how do you feel about it?

9. Now that we're not in the same immediate crisis circumstances of COVID-19 online instruction, what could you see yourself having done differently? Towards what kinds of teaching goals?

Section 4: Artifact #2 from another semester

1. Did the tool that you used to communicate change from Spring 2020? Why or why not?

2. How much time did you spend messaging students during this time?

3. How did it feel to be communicating with students at this point in time versus during the Spring 2020 semester?

4. What experiences, resources, or people were helpful to you as you were composing messages to students during this time?

5. Overall, how do you remember students responding to this semester's online communication, compared to Spring 2020?

Section 5: Snapshot of now

1. How has the way that you view online communication with students changed over the past two years?

2. What have you learned about teacher-student online communication over the past two years?

3. Now that we've experienced crisis communication and moved through several semesters of varying COVID risk mitigation, what do you think might best support teachers in communication with students online? What kinds of tools, resources, or mentoring are most productive?

APPENDIX D - INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTIONS

Q1. During the initial COVID-19 impacted semesters, how did you navigate communicating with students who were struggling through online messages?

Q2. Could you tell me a specific story about communicating with a student who was struggling?

Q3. When making the transition to online teaching and using online messaging tools as a primary form of communication, what was helpful to you? How did you learn how to communicate with students in this new way?

Q4. Looking back, would you change anything about how you communicated with students online over the past two years?

Q5. How did your online messaging with students change after the Spring of 2020? Specifically, did your teaching goals that were associated with online messaging change?

Q6. What have you learned about online communication with students over the past two years?

Q7. Now that we've experienced crisis communication and moved through several semesters of varying COVID risk mitigation, what do you think might best support teachers in communication with students online? What kinds of tools, resources, or mentoring are most productive?

Q8. Is there anything else that you can remember from our interview that you would like to share here? Or is there anything that you have been thinking about since our interview that you would like to share?