

# UCSB Academic Writing Partnership

Instruction in academic reading and writing skills  
at UCSB partnership high schools

**Evaluation Report 2002-2003**



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by:

Michelle W. Woodbridge, Ph.D.  
Evaluation Coordinator  
Office of Campus Outreach Initiatives  
University of California, Santa Barbara  
1503 South Hall  
Santa Barbara, CA 93106  
(805) 893-3105



# Introduction

In 2002-2003, the Academic Writing Project served 18 teachers and over 800 students within Ventura County at the following high schools:

Fillmore  
Fillmore High

Oxnard  
Channel Islands High  
Hueneme High

Santa Paula  
Santa Paula High

The Academic Writing Partnership (AWP) is an ongoing project (now completing its third year) supporting instruction in academic reading and writing skills at four of UCSB's partnership high schools including Channel Islands High School, Fillmore High School, Hueneme High School, and Santa Paula High School. AWP sends UCSB Writing Program faculty, who are also teacher-consultants in the South Coast Writing Project (SCWRIP), to these Ventura County partner high schools weekly to participate in English, history, AVID, and other content-area courses as guest presenters and co-teachers. Through presentations and collaborative lessons in the classroom, the AWP faculty instruct students in the kinds of academic reading and writing skills that they need for success in their college preparatory courses and, eventually, in their university coursework.

The AWP espouses the National Writing Project model of teachers learning from one another in nonhierarchical relationships. All participation is voluntary and collaborative. In more detail, the specific tools of the AWP include:

## **Subject A Practice Exam**

The University of California requires incoming students to take the Subject A Exam, consisting of a 700-1000 word nonfiction text and an essay topic on the text. The essay exam reflects the rhetorical demands of writing assignments typically assigned in first-year college courses. The AWP faculty are experienced Subject A readers, who also teach the UCSB course for students who do not pass the Subject A exam. In the partnership schools, they assist teachers in designing lessons to prepare their students for a practice Subject A essay. The essays are scored through the Diagnostic Writing Service (DWS), following a rubric developed especially for high school students by the University of California and the Educational Testing Service. When students receive their results, the AWP faculty discuss the diagnostic feedback and possible follow-up lessons with the teachers and their students. Familiarizing teachers and their students with the Subject A exam intersects the program's larger goal of connecting partnership high schools to the university and to academic discourse.



## **Classroom Demonstrations and Consultation**

Each school is served by an AWP faculty member who provides direct and continuing collegial coaching for a full or partial academic term. The coaches visit the classrooms of each participating teacher multiple times during the course of the year, (the specific number of visits are negotiated by the teacher and faculty), to provide demonstration lessons and serve as co-teachers, collaborators, and supportive colleague-resources.

In addition, the AWP faculty coordinate presentations to high school classes by UCSB students (including partner school alumni and/or first generation college students) on their own experiences preparing for and succeeding in college-level writing assignments. When possible, the AWP faculty coordinate letter and e-mail exchanges between high school and college classes.

### **Staff Development Workshops**

The AWP faculty consult with high school departments and instructors across the disciplines on academic writing instruction, evaluation, and curriculum design. They have both led and coordinated staff development workshops for larger faculty groups.

### **UCSB Campus Visits**

The AWP coordinates an annual visit to the UCSB Writing Program by partner school faculty to observe classes and to discuss issues with Writing Program faculty and other representatives of the UCSB outreach community.

## **Significance**

The transition from high school to college writing demands of students a major intellectual shift. In the university, the purpose of writing is no longer to report information but to develop analytical arguments. Students must learn to question, to apply ideas to the world beyond the text, and to formulate and critically assess their own positions. However, outside English courses, many students receive minimal practice in the techniques of active reading or in writing at a conceptual level. Furthermore, in their English courses, students primarily develop skills in conjunction with literature, not the nonfiction texts that comprise the bulk of college reading assignments.

The intellectual shift from high school to college writing poses challenges to most students but can be especially daunting to educationally disadvantaged students from the partnership schools, many of whom have consistently encountered barriers to college eligibility and success. By bringing in UCSB faculty to their classrooms on a regular basis, the AWP exposes these students to high standards of academic writing and, most importantly, provides the support that they and their teachers need to more confidently achieve those standards.

By observing first hand the range of high school writing pedagogies and getting to know the future UCSB students, the AWP faculty learn as much from their work as they teach. They view prospective students in action and gain a better understanding of the challenges they confront and the strengths they bring with them. Thus, in seeking to eliminate barriers-- both perceived and real-- between high school and college writing, the AWP faculty also remove barriers to student success that exist in their own classrooms at UCSB.

**The Academic Writing Partnership includes the following program components:**

- **Classroom presentations**
- **Collaborative teaching**
- **Consultation on writing instruction**
- **Staff development workshops**
- **Campus visits by teachers**
- **Subject A practice tests with Diagnostic Writing Service scoring**

# School Sites

The Academic Writing Partnership serves students in underperforming partnership schools who have encountered, throughout their education, barriers to college eligibility and success. The challenges in these communities include low family literacy rates, the absence of a college-bound culture, and a cycle of diminished expectations that often lowers standards of academic excellence. Due to their demographics—and the tremendous educational and socioeconomic challenges that those demographics reflect—these schools are also among the lowest performing in the state, with high concentrations of Latino students (about 80%), low-income students (about 50%), and limited-English proficient students (about 35%). In addition, many students are from recently-immigrated or migrant farm-working families with low levels of parental education. With little understanding of, and no direct experience with, California's educational system, these families are challenged by many hurdles to support their children's academic success.

The Academic Writing Project serves schools that are among the lowest performing in the state, with high concentrations of Latino, low income, and limited-English proficient students.

## Program Goals

The goals and objectives of the Academic Writing Partnership are diverse and ambitious. The program aims to accomplish immediate, measurable objectives with the teacher and student participants in the program, including the following:

### Teacher Objectives

- Increase teachers' understanding of college expectations for reading and writing
- Clarify teachers' understanding of their students' strengths and weaknesses in reading and writing
- Increase teachers' expectations for students to pursue higher education
- Improve/enhance teachers' strategies in the classroom to enhance student performance
- Increase teachers' collaboration with colleagues

### Student Objectives

- Improve student performance on writing tasks (Subject A, content essays, etc.)
- Increase students' understanding of college expectations for reading and writing
- Clarify students' understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses in reading and writing
- Improve students' attitudes about pursuing higher education
- Increase students' school, work, and life skills

# Methodology

The Academic Writing Partnership implemented a comprehensive evaluation component, collecting and utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data. The project evaluator documented the activities of the project, measured outcomes of the participants, informed the project managers of progress, and implemented the comprehensive formative and summative evaluation plan described below.

The major activities that occurred in the evaluation included:

- Collection of process activity data (documentation of classroom and workshop presentations, participant attendance, and general demographics)
- Administration of student and teacher surveys
- Analysis of Diagnostic Writing Service summary data for each school and student participants
- Selected in-depth interviews with program staff and participants

Student and teacher surveys were administered after classroom interventions and focused on the quality, relevance, and impact of the presentation(s) on student and teacher outcomes. This formative, quantitative feedback assisted project managers in gauging project implementation successes/weaknesses and adapting to student and teacher needs. The surveys focused on the project's immediate impact on student performance, college expectations, reading and writing skills, and teaching strategies/collaboration. Analyses disaggregated the data by variables including classroom teacher, project staff, and the presentation's focus.

Diagnostic Writing Service summary data provided indicators of participation in the activity, including the number of teachers using the exam and students' submissions for evaluation. In addition, school performance scores indicated trends and progress in various areas.

Upon completion of the project at the end of the academic year, the evaluator interviewed approximately one-third of the teachers engaged in the partnership (n=6) and all project staff members (n=3) engaged in project implementation. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, this qualitative data collection method explored participants' experiences in greater depth. Teachers submitted excerpts from actual student work and described the impact of the project on their classroom teaching strategies, their diagnostic and assessment methods, their students' skills, their expectations for student achievement, and their relationship with the university. Similarly, the project staff described their intervention techniques employed across different schools and classrooms, their diagnostic and assessment methods, their perception of student growth/progress, and their ongoing relationship with partnership schools.

**The major evaluation activities of the AWP included collection of process data, student surveys, teacher surveys, essay samples, and selected in-depth interviews.**

# Findings

## Process Activity Data

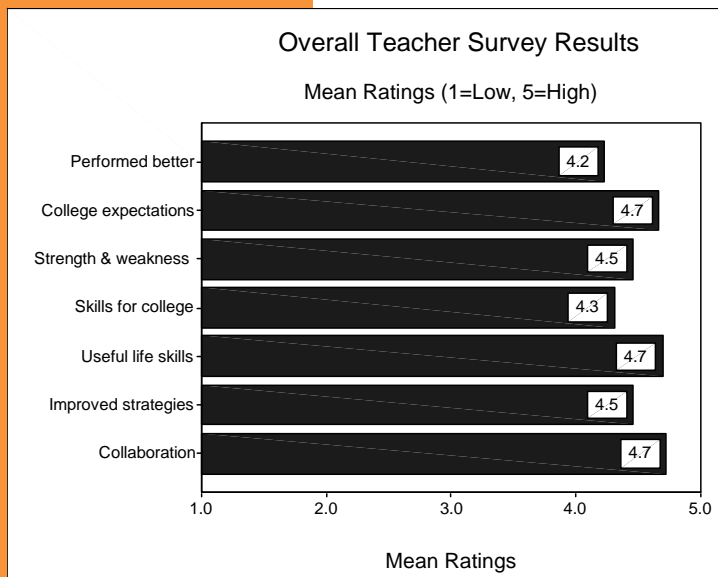
The Academic Writing Partnership served 18 teachers and over 800 students (in 33 different classes) in the 2002-2003 academic year. Students received Subject A Exam preparation workshops, and 546 students submitted their essays to the Diagnostic Writing Service (DWS) for scoring (including 260 sophomores). In addition, two teacher professional development workshops were offered to 10th and 11th grade teachers at Hueneme High School.

## Teacher Surveys

Teachers completed short surveys including seven questions (rated on a five-point Likert scale) concerning the contribution of the AWP toward the following:

- Their students' improved performances on the writing assignment(s)
- Their students' increased understanding about college expectations for reading, writing, and thinking
- Their students' increased understanding about their own strengths and weaknesses in reading, writing, and thinking
- The likelihood that their students will develop the reading, writing, and thinking skills necessary for college
- Their students gain of useful skills for their future school, work, or life experiences
- Their own improvement in teaching strategies/curriculum regarding writing
- Their increased collaboration with colleagues.

An overwhelming majority of teacher participants believe the AWP improved their students' writing performances, increased their understanding about college expectations, and improved their own teaching strategies.



In addition, the survey included an open-ended question for additional comments and suggestions for the program.

Thirteen teachers (n=13) completed the survey, and the results indicated the following:

- 92%-100% of the teachers answered each item with a "4" or a "5" on the 5-point scale, indicating strong agreement that the project had met the stated objectives.
- Mean scores ranged from 4.2 to 4.7 (SD ranged from .47-.66), as shown in the graph.

Teachers' narrative comments highlighted the value of the partnership for both their students and themselves. Excerpts included:

- *“Very helpful and worthwhile-- what a great experience. Glad to be a part of it.”*
- *“This was a valuable experience for both myself and my students.”*
- *“I can't say enough good things about my experience with [AWP faculty] this semester. She has been organized, motivated, and helpful. I will take many ideas and use them with my students.”*
- *“[Subject A] scores were better this time around. I have tried to incorporate these types of assignments into my curriculum. Eye opening experience for my students.”*

**“This was a valuable experience for both myself and my students.”**  
--AWP Teacher Participant

## Student Surveys

Students completed short surveys including five questions (rated on a five-point Likert scale) concerning the contribution of the AWP toward the following:

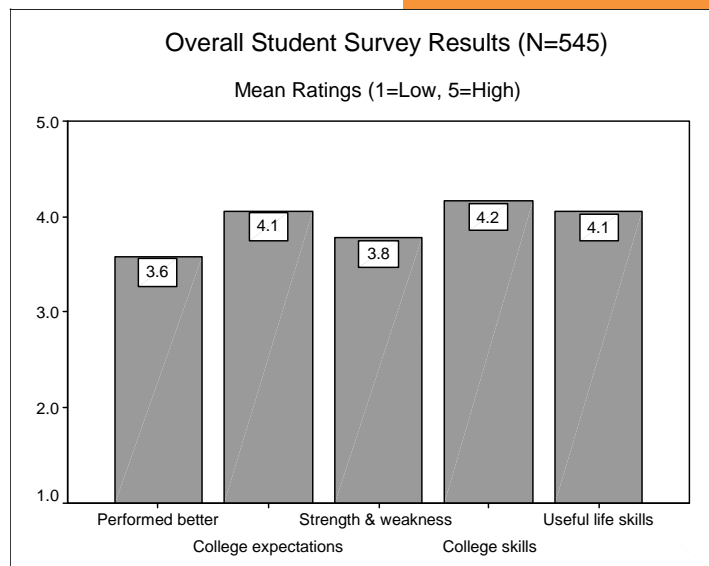
- Their improved performances on the writing assignment(s)
- Their increased understanding about college expectations for reading, writing, and thinking
- Their increased understanding about their own strengths and weaknesses in reading, writing, and thinking
- Their belief that they will develop the reading, writing, and thinking skills necessary for college
- Their gain of useful skills for their future school, work, or life experiences.

**A majority of student participants believe the AWP improved their writing performances, increased their understanding about college expectations, and helped them to gain useful life skills.**

In addition, the survey included an open-ended question for additional comments and suggestions for the program.

Five hundred and forty-five students (n=545) completed the survey, and the results indicated the following:

- 53%-81% of the students answered each item with a “4” or a “5” on the 5-point scale, indicating a majority were in strong agreement that the project had met the stated objectives.
- Mean scores ranged from 3.6 to 4.2 (SD ranged from .86-.89), as shown in the graph.



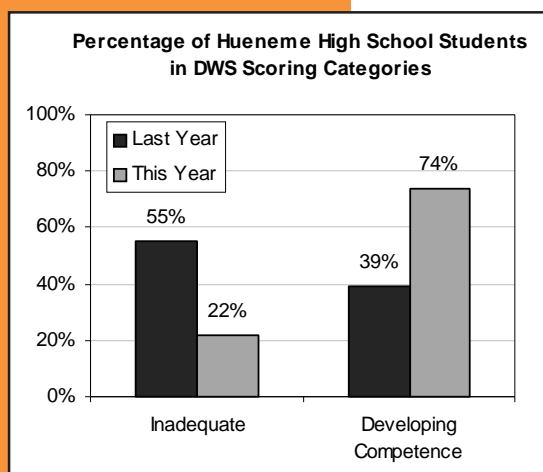
**“I feel that now, I do have a better understanding of how important writing is in college and what the standards are to get into a good college.”**  
--AWP Student Participant

Students' narrative comments documented their appreciation of the program, the skills they gained, and the friendly attitude of the AWP instructors:

- *“Thank you for taking your time in letting us know somewhat about expectations in college.”*
- *“I learned a lot from this experience.”*
- *“I loved doing this. I hope we can do it again. Thank you so much. Maybe I'll see you at UCSB if I get accepted there.”*
- *“It was really fun learning about how college classes work.”*
- *“I feel that now, I do have a better understanding of how important writing is in college and what the standards are to get into a good college.”*
- *“I have learned that you can write differently according to your audience/reader and the subject.”*
- *“I have learned better ways to get my thoughts out on paper.”*
- *“I learned how to express my thoughts clearly in my writing. I also learned more about my family history in the immigration writing project.”*
- *“I think [AWP faculty] was a very good instructor. She was very polite, and she didn't seem to think she was better than us, so it was easier to ask questions.”*
- *“It really helped, as she broke down the material for me to understand. I think we should keep having her come back, because she is a help.”*

### Diagnostic Writing Service Summary Data

The Diagnostic Writing Service summary reports are available through the Educational Testing Service to schools who submit writing samples. Students' scores are aggregated across years of participation by the essay prompts on which they wrote. Therefore, individual student growth and differences in cohorts cannot easily be disaggregated from the summaries unless the prompts differ from year to year. Fortunately, the prompt for the 2002-2003 essay differed from the previous year, so some comparisons are possible to assess recent program effects.



Data for this year's participating 11<sup>th</sup> graders in the AWP at Hueneme High School reveal a marked increase (compared to last year's summary report for both 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders) in the percentage of students moving up from the lowest category ("Inadequate") to the next highest category ("Developing Competence"). Last year, 55% of the students wrote essays deemed as "Inadequate;" this year, only 22% of the essays were scored as "Inadequate." In addition, more students wrote essays that demonstrated "Developing Competence:" 74% this year compared to 39% last year.

## Teacher Interviews

The evaluator conducted semi-structured interviews with six selected teacher participants during prep or break periods of a regular school day. The interview protocol addressed the following issues:

- How the AWP impacted their teaching strategies and skills
- How the AWP impacted their students' skills and achievement
- How the AWP impacted their students' attitudes about college
- The specific components of the AWP that worked most effectively and least effectively
- The teachers' suggestions for future structure and content.

The Social Science and English teachers (including 3 females and 3 males) represented each partnership school served by the AWP, and the AWP faculty selected these teachers due to their intensity of involvement in the program. It was assumed that teachers who were more actively engaged in the AWP could provide more constructive and rich feedback about the impact and structure of the program suitable for the evaluation.

Results of the teacher interviews have been synthesized below.

### ***Impact on Teaching Strategies and Skills***

The teachers unanimously acknowledged that the Academic Writing Partnership gave them the tools and the resources they needed to teach writing. Because the teaching of writing is a difficult process, many of the teachers admitted to “shying away from it” for many reasons, including because they felt awkward or ill-prepared for the task. Many of the teachers lacked practice and had not developed a sufficient rubric or other techniques to adequately assess their students. As one social science teacher stated, “I knew what the students needed to do to write. But I wasn’t really clear about how to *teach* it. I wanted the students to know that they would have to work hard, but I hoped the English Department could help them to prepare.”

This relegation of responsibility to the English Department was a typical practice in all of the schools prior to the introduction of the concept of writing-across-the-curriculum, stressed by the AWP and by the South Coast Writing Project. After demonstrating the use of writing as a tool to assist their students in their learning process, the AWP faculty helped all teachers to see the value of writing components, especially nonfiction reading-and-response assignments, within their curriculum. The social science teacher described his metamorphosis after two years in the AWP program. “Everything totally changed. I had to shift my expectations about what I was doing... We realized that writing for social science is a specific skill not taught in English, which focuses on literature, plays, and poetry. The kids have not learned how to write for our class... and most college writing is social science-type writing.”

Interviews were conducted with six participating teachers concerning how the AWP impacted their teaching strategies and their students' performances.

“The concept of *writing to understand* has sparked me.”  
--AWP Teacher Participant

**“I’ve learned a way of teaching [students] to write better, and that’s made all the difference.”**

--AWP Teacher Participant

After reflecting on his first 13 years of teaching without the AWP, the teacher admitted that all of his students demonstrated “deplorable writing, awful essays from all levels—freshmen through seniors—and it never got better.” Since his participation in the AWP, however, “I’ve learned a way of teaching [students] to write better, and that’s made all the difference.” Another social science teacher with three years of experience in the AWP program affirmed, “I’ve changed the emphasis in class to focus on [each unit] always having a writing component. The concept of *writing to understand* has sparked me.” She uses writing to help her students to understand the complexities of a text or a time period, for example. In instructing and working with her students using the AWP techniques—while also thinking about writing as a tool to understand and know things, this teacher believes she has increased her own writing skills and confidence: “I have to say, I’m a better writer, too.”

**“It took [the students’ writing] to a whole new level.”**

--AWP Teacher Participant

The teachers also acknowledged that the AWP faculty provided their classes with an abundance of resources to support their students’ writing techniques and styles. The faculty’s access to materials from the UCSB Writing Program and their “wealth of experience in the field” was cited as one of the most beneficial aspects of the program. For instance, one faculty member brought samples of writing from Hispanic authors to share with high school juniors in their English course, and they “included really good essays that the students could relate to,” the teacher confirmed. The AWP staff also shared samples of graded Subject A exams that provided the students and the teachers with concrete models about what constituted a well-written, “adequate” college-level essay. When specific needs arose within a class, such as one group of students’ difficulties with writing introductory paragraphs or transitions, the AWP faculty provided handouts about techniques including examples of different styles. As a result, the students saw firsthand “that you don’t have to start so basic, so elementary.” By demonstrating different methods to incorporate more vocabulary and to focus the students’ on what they learned, “It took it to a whole new level,” praised one teacher. Due to the collaboration with the AWP faculty, the teachers and students have a larger repertoire of ideas and resources on which to rely—a “place to go to get ideas”—referring to the handouts and previous work accumulated from the AWP lessons.

In addition to good models of written products, the AWP faculty provided the teachers with effective teaching methods to encourage more productive writing in their classrooms. Most of the teachers emphasized the abundant “frontloading” techniques that the faculty modeled with their students to elicit better content and structure in their work. For example, in preparation for a personal essay assignment, one of the faculty facilitated abundant brainstorming with the students, encouraging them to write ideas about themselves, their town, their education, and other details in their journals for about two weeks. She elicited ideas about how to present themselves to someone who doesn’t know them, and she emphasized that the sense of their audience is paramount. The teacher believed that the resulting letters

passionately expressed details about the students inner selves, their weaknesses, and their curiosity about college life. “It was really marvelous stuff!” he praised. Particularly her brainstorming technique, the teacher said, “showed me how sometimes I cut things too short. She reconstituted my scope of what to do.” The teacher was impressed, in this assignment and in many others, with the AWP faculty’s ability to “keep turning the soil... She got the kids percolating. She got me thinking, and I like to think. [The AWP faculty] got my mind ploughed for sowing.” Another teacher praised similar pre-writing and brainstorming techniques with her class, describing the process as “loosening up the students” and doing “a lot to mix it up and get [the students] moving around” in a nonthreatening way that builds their confidence, validates their ideas, and provides them with more material with which they can work. The faculty commonly utilized small group work within the classes, for example, to encourage students to discuss their ideas with their peers and to present their findings to the whole class.

The participating teachers praised many other teaching strategies introduced in their classrooms by the AWP. One particularly effective method was the faculty’s demonstrating the dissection of essay prompts—from deciphering the prompt’s major components (which typically include a factual question about the text and another question to elicit breadth of knowledge and experience relevant to the text) to analyzing the prompt’s level of cognitive activity according to Bloom’s taxonomy. Other methods included mini-lessons dedicated to helping the students to find information that supports their theses, to cite legitimate sources, and to develop commentary and conclusions that draw all components together in a well-organized, multi-paragraph essay. One teacher applauded the AWP faculty’s ability to demonstrate attribution techniques to his students and “how to naturally blend other voices in their papers.” He also believes that the project greatly influenced him, as an English teacher, to provide more nonfiction assignments in his classes to prepare his students for a broad range of college majors (such as business, science, and mathematics). Still, another teacher commented passionately that the most critical lesson she would like to give her students is a “love of writing.” “I want [writing] to be joyful, and for [the students] to see reasons to write beyond getting into a university... Writing isn’t something we do because the institution imposes it on us.” For these reasons, she has assigned various types of writing in her social science class from fictional stories and letters to the editor to interviews with family members and analytical research papers.

When asked whether the AWP project influenced their assessment of student work, most of the teachers answered with a resounding “Yes!” A few teachers referenced a recent article in the *Los Angeles Times* that reported the challenges of high school research assignments on English teachers as well as their students. The workload of a typical teacher is quite onerous; one teacher, for example, taught over 100 students in his daily courses alone. “How do you grade that many

**“[The AWP faculty] got the kids percolating. She got me thinking, and I like to think. She got my mind ploughed for sowing.”**

**--AWP Teacher Participant**

**“I want the kids to love writing. I want it to be joyful, and for them to see reasons to write beyond getting into a university.”**

**--AWP Teacher Participant**

**“This program changed my method of teaching. I make my expectations clearer to my students, and that makes it easier for them to meet my expectations.”**

--AWP Teacher Participant

**“Sometimes I’ve sold [my students] short. I’ve seen how they may not shine for you, but they can shine for someone else.”**

--AWP Teacher Participant

papers?” he asked. In response, the AWP faculty discussed with the teachers ways of coping with their paperwork load. One effective method they shared was a holistic rubric scoring process that reduces the amount of written comments necessary on each paper. Another teacher admitted that she believes herself to be “a harsher evaluator of writing. I don’t accept what I might have accepted three years ago.” Before her participation in the AWP, the teacher believed that her scoring rubric did not adequately focus on priority expectations—and she didn’t have a clear enough understanding of what her expectations and the expectations of college instructors were. Another teacher stressed, “I’ve always had high expectations for my students. This program changed my method of teaching. I make my expectations clearer to my students, and that makes it easier for them to meet my expectations. It increases their motivation to meet them.” In addition, a great emphasis in the project during the practice Subject A exam was enhancement of the students’ own diagnostic abilities. Across all classes, the AWP faculty (or the Subject A Web site) provided students with sample essays at four different levels of proficiency. The students were guided in their analysis of the essays, often creating lists of criteria for “passing” and discussing unique attributes of the differing levels. Due to these exercises, the teachers and the students learned much about college-level expectations and feedback. In fact, one teacher claimed, “I think the Subject A was probably more a learning experience for me than for [the students].”

Through it all, the most valuable component of the partnership to the teachers was the collaboration and partnering with a college instructor. This partnership, according to one teacher, “offers teachers growth,” and they see how writing can be effectively embedded in their day-to-day curriculum with techniques that work with various teaching styles. “I enjoyed having [the AWP faculty] in my class and the opportunity for team teaching,” one teacher affirmed. “She’d lead, but I’d chime in,” particularly to point out activities and topics of relevance to their other assignments and discussions. The result was often, in the best cases, a seamless integration with their on-going academic content. One teacher described a particularly well-connected writing assignment that encouraged an animated, academic, and enlightening discussion among the students, the teacher, and the AWP faculty as “all I’ve ever dreamed about as a teacher.”

This collaborative teaching model also offered the teachers opportunities to see their students interact with another instructor. While most of the teachers believed it “rejuvenated” them and “validated that they were going in the right direction” with their students, another teacher acknowledged that it opened his eyes to their new-found abilities. In working with the AWP, he said, he realized that “sometimes I’ve sold [my students] short. I’ve seen how they may not shine for you, but they can shine for someone else.” Yet, the positive structure of the program did not make it feel intimidating or hierarchical in nature. Teachers confirmed that the AWP faculty did not try to imply

that they were the experts. “[She] is not someone here to show us how to do it. It’s to show us possibilities and alternatives—how it could be done,” one teacher stressed. In fact, the teachers believed that it truly was a “partnership” with each professional learning from the other. “[The AWP faculty] is not someone here to teach us how, but rather to join us. That’s what I love about this approach with the partnership,” another teacher asserted. “It’s like she provides us with some vitamins.”

Most importantly to other teachers, the AWP provided a framework to align curriculum and increase articulation across subjects and throughout the high school years into college-level work. One teacher participant shared how, during a recent teachers’ inservice day, the focus of the professional development was on “writing across the curriculum.” As a participant in the AWP and a fellow of the South Coast Writing Project, the teacher presented information about nonfiction writing strategies, and he encouraged his colleagues to consider assigning their students mini-research papers. Thus, the writing project expanded its influence beyond the original participating teachers to reach a variety of content departments and at a deeper level in the culture of the school (as teachers go on to support their colleagues in their teaching of writing).

### ***Impact on Students’ Skills and Attitudes***

One of the most significant reactions of the students to the AWP was, according to their teachers, a sense of confidence they gained in their abilities—confidence instilled by someone outside of their regular classroom environment. All of the teachers recognized that having university writing professors in the classroom—their physical presence—was an “incredible, powerful statement. It said to the kids ‘We value what you can become so much, that we’ll invest in you now,’” explained one teacher. The AWP faculty nurtured this confidence carefully and progressively, first by bonding with the students. One teacher described how, during his class’ first meeting with the AWP faculty, she literally “kicked off her shoes” to join in with them during a recreational break. Another recalled fondly how, on her first day with a class of juniors, the AWP faculty asked all of the students where they wanted to go to college. Then, throughout the term, she would refer to the students by their college choice: “OK, Harvard guy,…” The AWP faculty member also expressed to their students her great interest in their writing. Her comments on their use of language were unique and individualized, including feedback in their journals such as “poetic sentences” or “golden lines”—evaluations of their work they had never heard, let alone from a college professor. In reflecting on her rapport with their students, these teachers relayed how, by the third week, the students “were all running up to her. She has such professional clarity. Her feedback is so different than mine.” As a result, the teachers believed that the high school students felt very fortunate to have the attention of a college professor for the course of a term, and in this time,

**“[The AWP faculty] is not someone here to teach us how, but rather to join us. That’s what I love about this approach with the partnership.”**

**--AWP Teacher Participant**

**Teachers recognized a significant increase in their students’ confidence levels as a result of their interactions with the AWP faculty.**

Teachers recognized students' increased skills in dissecting prompts, knowing what to write, and using feedback to improve their writing as well as increased motivation to take on academic challenges.

"The exposure to [the AWP faculty] was sort of like a bulldozer plowing through a mystical forest. It was clear that at the end of the tunnel, you could go to college."

--AWP Teacher Participant

many of them "flourished" with a positive change in their self images and an increase in their "can-do" spirit. One teacher summed up this bonding experience, critical for both him and his students, as:

*"She made me realize... sometimes I think it's a swamp of reluctant readers and reluctant writers— those students who don't even come to class. Most kids, though, responded to her. First as a human, second as a teacher—a very good English teacher."*

The demonstration of effective teaching techniques that engaged the students in collaborative learning, provided hands-on strategies, exposed them to good writing models, and broke down assignments into workable "chunks," all assisted the students in meeting the challenges with positive feedback and great success. Consequently, the teachers recognized the students' increased skills in analyzing prompts, knowing what to write, maintaining the proper conventions, and using feedback to continue their growth and learning to reach proficient levels in their writing assignments. The students displayed these abilities in their improved scores on the Subject A exams as well as on other standardized tests such as the California High School Exit Exam. One teacher gathered an array of longitudinal data documenting his students' progress across the years on the Subject A, and the increase in the number of students reaching the "proficient/adequate writing" level. With great authority, he proudly testified that the report "supports the contention that the writing project has an amazing effect on my students."

Furthermore, the students increased confidence levels, their growing abilities, their access to resources (such as their journals and handouts), and their relationship with a college instructor have all helped to reduce their intimidation to engage in the writing process and to consider attending colleges and four-year universities. One teacher testified that, while most of his college preparatory students "are not even thinking about four-year university," he believes that as a result of their participation in the AWP, they believe "I can do this! Maybe college is for me!" In fact, he also recognized that "a lot of kids want to try AP for their junior year. I think this never would have happened without the writing program and the Subject A." Another teacher described this increase in confidence and understanding of college "like a bulldozer plowing through a mystical forest. It was clear that at the end of the tunnel, you could go to college, continue with schooling... [The AWP faculty] took the mystery out of a four-year university." In addition to providing perspectives about university-level work, other teachers were also quick to commend the AWP faculty's support of all pathways to higher education. One teacher commented that the AWP faculty's "peppering anecdotes" of experiences across the college scenes (including her work at a local community college) were helpful to his diverse classes who needed to hear more than just about the university.

## ***Teacher Suggestions for Program Improvement***

Most of the teacher participants, while quite pleased with the impact of the program on their students' and their own teaching success, recognized a need for additional time to reflect and dialogue about the program. Teachers wanted additional time formally built into the format to work with their faculty partner and to debrief about the techniques displayed in the classes, about their observations of the students, and about the resulting writing products. "We do it on the fly," one teacher explained, describing time allotted to discuss the collaboration. "It doesn't dignify what can happen with this kind of a process and collaboration." For these reasons, she and other recommended that the program provide additional resources and structured meetings to ensure that, on an ongoing basis, teachers provide input to facilitate the growth of the program in their schools.

In addition, a number of teachers suggested that more formalized training might be helpful for them in the pre-planning stages of the program. While time was devoted to planning in the beginning, some of the teachers desired "more grounding" in the writing strategies and models. Without sufficient training, "we feel inadequate because we can't teach it," one teacher lamented. She suggested that the project might support their own summer institute or their attendance at the SCWriP summer institute, for example. Another teacher thought that this kind of training would be beneficial "to get teachers on the same page." He recognized that teacher collaboration and understanding of the project's objectives were inconsistent across his school. Rather than working collaboratively with the AWP faculty in a team-teaching approach, some of the teachers just turned over their classes to her.

Other teachers desired more time and more regularity in the scheduled classroom visits to their school. In one partnership school where the AWP faculty is shared with another school, the teachers wished her services could be exclusively devoted to their school—allowing for more time in their classrooms and in their colleagues' classrooms. For example, recommended one teacher, the program would be greatly beneficial to the Science Department. "It would demystify expository writing and reduce the burden on the English teachers," she stated. These teachers furthered their opinion that if high school teachers who "have experienced this would offer anecdotes and demonstrations" to their colleagues, it would increase the exposure across all the disciplines. Another teacher in a different school concurred, suggesting that group meetings with teachers that provided training in how to "pass it on" to their students and colleagues in a larger setting might be a solution to the dwindling resources. While he recognized the high value of classroom presentations, he also saw the need to cut costs and maintain high project impact. One teacher offered, "I would love to talk to other teachers to explain how important this is. It's one of the most important things we've done here."

**"We [communicate about the project] on the fly. It doesn't dignify what can happen with this kind of process and collaboration."**

**--AWP Teacher Participant**

**"I would love to talk to other teachers to explain how important this is. It's one of the most important things we've done here."**

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**“If we can’t get access to [the DWS] at any time, it is a flaw. We are curriculum-driven, standards-based. We have to fit the Subject A in at a particular time rather than just when it is offered.”**

**--AWP Teacher Participant**

A couple of teachers suggested additional strategies that they found particularly helpful in their classes. One, borrowed from a colleague, is a “comment log,” where students log all of the teacher’s written feedback from their previous writing assignments. The log has assisted students in recognizing their continued bad habits and working on their individual issues in their writing. As a result, it has also reduced the teacher’s frustration with the students’ ignoring her comments and guidance. Another teacher highlighted the great addition to this year’s AWP at his school that he hopes to continue in future years: the visiting of the high school classes by current university undergraduates who are alumni of the high school. The undergraduates discussed their experiences at the university, and the hurdles they surmounted to get there. “The kids loved having them here,” said the teacher. “It was a great cap at the end of all this.”

Finally, a teacher commented on the weakness of the Subject A scoring process— particularly the rigid “windows of opportunity” to access the DWS evaluation system on-line. She claimed, “If we can’t get access to it at any time, it is a flaw. We are curriculum-driven, standards-based. We have to fit the Subject A in at a particular time rather than just when it is offered.” She suggested that the project coordinators and the teachers might be able to devise a new method of evaluating the Subject A essay submissions that is “meaningful and standardized” and still adaptable to their high school timetable. She intends to work with her AWP faculty partner this summer to develop and facilitate an improved mechanism for next year.

### **AWP Faculty Interviews**

The evaluator also conducted a semi-structured focus group including the three faculty members of the Academic Writing Partnership: Heather Horn, Ilene Miele, and Shelley Spear. The interview protocol addressed the following issues:

- How the AWP impacted the teachers’ strategies and skills
- How the AWP impacted the students’ skills and achievement
- The specific components of the AWP that worked most effectively and least effectively
- The preparation and support they received in their role as AWP faculty
- Their suggestions for future structure, content, and evaluation.

Results of the faculty focus group have been synthesized below.

### ***Impact on Teaching Strategies and Skills***

One of the AWP faculty described how she believed the project’s impact was “very different class-to-class.” In the beginning, she would engage the students her own version of the writing lesson. Then, the teachers would integrate her methods with their own individualized styles and approaches, resulting in techniques that varied greatly along a

continuum—from a neatly-packaged writing program with directive techniques geared toward a formulaic structure to a very flexible style emphasizing strategies that support student topics.

In all, the faculty found it “interesting to see how [high school teachers] made the material and information ‘their own’—especially those teachers in the third year of the project.” The faculty recognized that the teachers, given more time in the partnership, were much more collaborative, and the teachers were taking on leadership roles in modeling and sharing with their colleagues. In successful collaborations, the faculty observed the teachers fine-tuning what they were doing in their classes so that the project closely resembled the IIMPaC model of instruction with demonstration lessons. “Those teachers didn’t need me to come back the second term,” one faculty said. The most successful teachers in the partnership, the faculty concurred, were those who “worked on assignments even when [we were] not there—they integrated them into their past and future lessons.” These teachers that continued and sustained the lessons, they affirmed, usually had students who took the writing assignments more seriously and had better attitudes overall.

Two of the faculty recognized that the partnership offered the teachers “space for conversation” as they shared a mutual experience with their colleagues. One faculty described how the teachers at her school were creating opportunities to discuss the project within their Social Science department through presentations of mini-workshops. The teachers will show the materials and the process they used in their class, with the opportunity to discuss possible curricular or methodological adaptations. Another faculty affirmed, “Our presence creates an opportunity for reflection.” Teaching then becomes less of an isolated act, she said, as the teachers have a sounding board—an opportunity to talk with a colleague to find ways to fine-tune what they are doing. For example, by sharing in very collaborative relationships, the AWP offered teacher participants “a social aspect that is so often missing from teaching.” In addition, a faculty member asserted, “it became clear from the beginning that a strength of the project was the on-campus events,” referring to the teachers’ UCSB campus visit in November. “It created a space for reflection,” she explained, and the teachers had the opportunity to talk within their departments as well as across schools. Another faculty member emphasized that bringing UCSB students back to the high school campus also greatly impacted on teachers’ perceptions. In fact, one teacher confided that, upon seeing one high school alumni as a current coed, she remembered how she held low expectations for the student when he was in her class. “I used to look at that kid and think he shouldn’t go to the university. Now look at him!” she admitted, with pride and astonishment. The AWP faculty suggested that the project helped the teachers to recognize the students’ accomplishments rather than to only see them in the light of their shortcomings. The third faculty member agreed, observing that many of the teachers with whom she worked seemed to be quite negative about their students initially. As

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**The AWP faculty recognized that their novelty level in the classroom was a great advantage in the successful delivery of writing lessons.**

time went on, their negative attitudes toward their students seemed to decrease, they vented their frustrations more to her, and they increased their collaboration with her.

Finally, the faculty reflected on the suitability of the project in some of the high school classes. “In some classes, I felt that there was a mismatch with the teacher and how we tried to encourage their preparing for college. I felt like we were performing a *service*, bringing something that the students wouldn’t get otherwise.” This service may lead to a change in the teacher’s instruction, she noted, but it was not the ideal model. Rather the AWP can make “already fabulous teachers better. They benefit from collaboration and reflection, and they fine-tune what they are already doing.” One faculty member felt gratified, in fact, for the opportunity to “add a different college perspective to what was already a skillfully-taught AP [English] class.”

### ***Impact on Students’ Skills and Attitudes***

The AWP faculty made a conscientious effort to examine the overall trends reported in the DWS data to gauge student progress throughout the project. In those data, they noticed that there were improvements from last year to this year. The students’ proficiency levels were moving up to the next category of proficiency. Some students saw progress, and other students did not—but almost all were willing to keep working. Another faculty member described one cohort of students with whom she was “very impressed with their performance.” She administered the DWS to the class in April of last year and then again in November of this year. Many of the students with lower scores improved to higher scores. “I don’t think I was the key factor,” she conceded, “but it was heartening to see that kind of growth.” The faculty member also highlighted the fact that every 11<sup>th</sup> grade CP and honors student at her school worked on the DWS essay assignment—including some isolated examples of students who, for whatever reasons, commonly disengage and fail to turn in their work. Unfortunately, however, a much smaller number of students submitted their essays for the DWS scoring, due in part to the time lag between the students’ finishing their essays and the staff’s receiving submission codes. (UC pulled the plug on the DWS funding, so the staff had to secure other outside funding from the UCSB Chancellor’s Outreach Advisory Board before students could submit essays.)

All of the staff recognized that their “novelty” level in the classroom was a great advantage in the successful delivery of the writing lessons. Even students who were hostile to authority and resistant would engage in the process—at least at first. But the staff also recognized that typically, as time went on, they lost that novelty “edge” and the students would fall back into their regular routines. Yet through it all, one faculty member asserted that the students’ skill levels and understanding of expectations at the college level improved as a result of their participation in the AWP. For example, in one social science class, the faculty recognized that students were not just memorizing facts or

regurgitating information. They were discovering relationships, and they were contemplating the “So what?” of the text to assist in the development of a thesis or claim. Much of the credit was also attributed to the high school teacher, who focused her course on critical thinking and the use of primary sources in their writing.

The AWP faculty characterized the project’s learning outcomes as a “two-way” street between the students and the teachers. “[The project] was useful for me in understanding the circumstances students come from and in understanding their capabilities,” acknowledged one faculty. She thought it was particularly instructive and poignant to see the students “outside of their problems with writing” for both the AWP staff and the teacher participants— such as when they visited the UCSB campus and current undergraduates. The other faculty agreed, saying that the “experience has also changed *our* perceptions of our students. I have a renewed appreciation for just how dedicated our students have to be to get here [to the university].” The third faculty member concurred, stating, “It’s amazing how much sophistication is required. People don’t appreciate that.” “And the understanding of what it takes to rise to the top, in an atmosphere that wants to pull them down,” added another. This faculty member especially noted the achievement of the students who challenge themselves with honors courses: “They have fought that to create a subculture of achievement.”

### ***Faculty Suggestions for Program Improvement***

All of the AWP faculty concurred that it would be beneficial to have an orientation/training for all staff/faculty involved in outreach services regarding the various components of UCSB campus outreach and how their projects fit into the overall structure. For example, AWP faculty could have benefited from the knowledge that EAOP has a campus visit coordinator when they were planning student and teacher visits. They also suggested that UCSB Campus Outreach Initiatives should create a directory or handbook including all of the Faculty Outreach Grants. While the Campus Outreach Initiatives has helped the outreach endeavors to be more collaborative and focused, one faculty mentioned the oversight of the College of Letters and Science in including the Writing Program in their outreach directory. She reflected on how, when she began at UCSB, “no one in the partner schools understood how UCSB outreach worked”—even some outreach administrators themselves would confuse the Writing Program with the Writing Project.

Similarly, the faculty also said that they hoped to see increased opportunities for other faculty in the Writing Program to be involved in the AWP. The requests from high school teachers for their assistance is overwhelming, and they would like to be able to call on others in the program to offer help—without them feeling as if they were completely outside and uncomfortable in playing a supportive role. One of the faculty, who recently concentrated her effort at Hueneme High School this year because the school supplied additional funding to the project

**“The experience has also changed *our* perceptions of our students. I have a renewed appreciation for just how dedicated our students have to be to get here [to the university].”**  
--AWP Faculty

**The AWP faculty would like to see more Writing Program faculty to be involved in the project.**

**“I felt like the Avon lady. I spent most of my time visiting classes and talking to teachers.”**

--AWP Faculty on the early months of the AWP project

**“I loved the [AWP] project and learned much.”**

--AWP Faculty

for her exclusive services, said that she enjoyed “not spreading herself across two schools. I can’t go back to that. I need time to focus, to have relationships, and to talk to the teachers.” For instance, she described how this year she was able to sit at lunch with the teachers and engage in conversations about curriculum adaptations. They had informal conversations that, in retrospect, were as important as her classroom presence. To this, another faculty suggested that the project formally incorporate structured lunch meetings in the design and a commitment to full-time work in the participating classrooms *over a period of time*. That way, the faculty could work with the teacher to lay out lesson plans and develop curriculum.

The AWP faculty emphasized the critical need to develop and nurture relationships with teachers throughout the duration of the project. One of the faculty members testified that most of her initial time was spent on building relationships and figuring out who to work with most efficiently. While many of the teachers said they wanted her in their classrooms, less were willing to plan and adapt their curriculum or deviate from their plans. In the Fall of 2001, in fact, the faculty said she “felt like the Avon lady. I spent most of my time visiting classes and talking to teachers.” While it was frustrating to her, and she felt anxious at the lack of progress, as she reflects on it, she realizes it was essential. Actually, the faculty member admitted that what she liked best about the project was its flexibility—that she could do very different things to serve teachers in very different ways. While she felt accountable for program results, she also learned to appreciate the amorphous quality of the work that allowed her the flexibility to target individual needs.

Another faculty member suggested that the project staff could benefit from more time together on campus to talk with each other about their progress. At times, she felt quite isolated and without opportunities for interaction with the other faculty members (since she was not on the UCSB campus). She “loved the project and learned much,” but ideally she feels that the position is better suited for a staff member on campus, who might be able to engage in formal or even informal discussions with her colleagues. She also put many more hours into the project than she had initially predicted. Much of her time, however, was not dedicated to classroom presentations or preparation. Rather, she spent much of this overtime on writing up midterm and final reports, preparing for the Urban Sites Conference, and attending meetings. These tasks should be added to the scope of work, and future faculty members should be aware of their additional time commitment. The other faculty members, however, believed that the efforts they expended on the project were “increasingly on par with how much she must do to prepare for a course.” While they acknowledged that their first three quarters in the AWP were more stressful, they now “know the ropes, know the people.”

One difficulty that the faculty experienced was the scheduling of classroom presentations across multiple classrooms and teachers. For instance, when faculty would call to confirm appointments with teachers, the teachers would often need to rearrange or reschedule. This would throw off the entire itinerary, affecting multiple presentations. Thus, the faculty learned that it was necessary to contact teachers far ahead of the scheduled presentation to remind them as well as to confirm with them shortly before any classroom activity. While this difficulty in coordinating the teachers' schedule was frustrating, one faculty stressed that some deeper problems existed due to the personality of the classes and/or the teacher's classroom management skills. The least successful cases were, as described by one faculty member, the ones "when the teacher didn't participate—just sat in the corner, cleaning out a closet, doing their attendance, or acting as a shadow." Another faculty member agreed, emphasizing that novice teachers may not have enough experience to collaborate and to generalize and individualize lessons to their classroom. Thus, she recommended that new teachers not be included in the project. On the contrary, however, the third faculty member said that she had "no problem with first year teachers." In some of the particularly good cases, in fact, she found the novice teachers "so uncomfortable teaching writing that they really wanted outside support."

The faculty would also like to see the participating teachers from Hueneme High School speak at more events about their experiences in the project. Their testimonials would be helpful in articulating the successful AWP model, in increasing interest at other schools and in other departments, and in relaying the important message that the project works "from the ground up" to meet the individual needs of the teachers. Simultaneously, the faculty would also like to find ways to expand UCSB student-initiated outreach, opening the opportunities to other high schools' alumni and connecting freshmen students on campus with other students from their communities.

When asked about their major priorities for outreach next year, the AWP faculty stressed *continuity*. "Key programs have to be preserved," one faculty asserted. She described how she had recently witnessed negative changes at a school where it seemed all was going well. The English department disintegrated into a weak, un-unified group. "In that light, it's even more important to continue our work," she urged, while also emphasizing that the work of the UCSB site coordinator was even "more important than anything I do." Another faculty agreed with the concept of continuity because teachers, she said, are accustomed to the "next fad" in educational reform. "It's part of their hesitation in working with us. But to see meaningful change takes time," she stressed. She recognizes that there is much turnover in the schools in which they work, and a teacher participant in the program may be gone the next year.

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# Conclusion

The Academic Writing Partnership (AWP) has demonstrated multiple positive outcomes in its quest to support instruction in academic reading and writing skills at UCSB partnership high schools—schools that are among the lowest performing in the state. Through its Subject A practice exam training, classroom demonstrations and consultation, professional development workshops, and UCSB campus visits for teachers and students, the AWP shows an impact on student performances, students skill levels, and students' understanding of college expectations. Furthermore, the project supports teachers' improvement of strategies and curriculum related to writing and teachers' enhanced collaboration with colleagues.

Participating teachers in the AWP described, in in-depth interviews, their new-found comfort and success in teaching academic writing due to the effective methods demonstrated by the AWP faculty and the helpful resources and models they brought to their classes. Most importantly, they praised the opportunities granted to them to collaborate and team-teach with an outstanding college instructor—who offered a powerful presence in their classrooms, greatly affecting the teachers as well as their students. Students flourished in this environment, they testified, and the students' increased their enthusiasm, confidence, and abilities in writing. Furthermore, their increased confidence levels, writing skills, access to resources, and their relationship with a college instructor all helped to reduce the students' intimidation about attending college.

Participating teachers and faculty hope to increase the time formally built into the AWP project's format to plan with their partners and to debrief about the techniques displayed in the classes, about observations of the students, and about the resulting writing products. In addition, they hope to devise a more suitable method of evaluating the Subject A essay submissions due to past difficulties with the Diagnostic Writing Service process.

As a result of its outcomes, and despite some of its challenges, there was a resounding pride and overwhelming affirmation of the positive impact of the Academic Writing Project among interviewed staff and participants. All participants hope to continue or increase their involvement, and faculty demonstrate a commitment to its sustainability. However, the reality of recent budget cuts, including significant reductions in state funds for higher education and outreach services, will require AWP program coordinators to focus their efforts differently and more strategically next year. While the commitment and enthusiasm remain among coordinators and participants, program reductions rather than expansions will most likely take place—meaning fewer teachers, students, and visits to the schools. The AWP staff, in response, have pledged to find creative ways to augment their work with teachers and to continue to serve the educational needs of local students.



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