

# Writing in PME

2nd Quarter, 2020

## Faculty Spotlight



Dr. Susan L. Steen is an Assistant Professor of Cross-Cultural Communication with the USAF Center of Language and Culture (CLC) at Air War College, which she joined in Fall 2015. Prior to that Dr. Steen was the Assistant Provost and Director of International Engagement at the University of Huntsville. She began her career at the University of Southern Mississippi where she earned her doctoral degree in intercultural communication.

Dr. Steen takes a holistic perspective to implementing writing in her classes. Spending time getting to know one another and building trust are crucial to student success in her courses. She understands that trust facilitates openness in the classroom, which facilitates sharing and brokering honest peer feedback. Dr. Steen also uses reflective writing to reinforce the students' learning experience by asking them to write down goals at the beginning of the term. The students also write about how they are meeting those goals and recognize that their goals may change. The students are required to apply the abstract academic theories to their professional lives. At the end of the course, students write to reflect upon their experiences throughout the course, their projects, and their learning. "The key to improving writing," says Dr. Steen, "is to make connections through conversation and writing. Doing so, making connections between theory and professional experience, enables students to articulate ideas and create new knowledge."

Dr. Steen does not distinguish between writing and thinking; she understands that writing is thinking. She practices her foundational pedagogical understanding by asking students to engage in recursive writing tasks and building social structures to help them apply the lessons of her course to their professional actions. For those reasons, Dr. Steen is this quarter's faculty spotlight.

Under the threat of COVID19, PME faculty moved rapidly to online teaching, but faculty often possess limited online teaching experience. The study of online writing instruction (OWI) provides excellent guidance for online instructors. Here are five OWI highlights: 1) The online environment will necessarily impinge on faculty's preferred teaching patterns (lecture, discussion, small group, consultation, etc.). Focus on creating feedback cultures. Feedback cultures will necessarily correlate the medium, content, and ways they connect with students, changing interaction patterns to more effectively facilitate student learning. 2) It is easy to overwhelm students with extensive feedback when working online. Be sure to prioritize feedback based on your pedagogy, the assignment standards, goals, purpose, and step in the developmental process. 3) Be both positive and negative in comments. Positive comments identify and explain why a portion of a document is working well, helping students anchor their efforts.. Be sure, in negative comments, to identify the problem, why it is a problem, and a strategy for improvement. 4) The written word sounds harsher than the same spoken words because the written word lacks inflection, phrasing, and facial expressions. Strive for a soft tone in correspondence and chat. 5) Spend time discussing exemplars in the online environment to encourage students to self-regulate and revise their own work.

## Tip for Teaching Writing Online

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### Writing Center Consortium for Graduate-level PME

