

Spring 5-10-2016

# Building a Case for Smaller English Class Sizes

Cara Lee Smith

*Kennesaw State University*, [clee56@kennesaw.edu](mailto:clee56@kennesaw.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/mapw\\_etd](http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/mapw_etd)



Part of the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Smith, Cara Lee, "Building a Case for Smaller English Class Sizes" (2016). *Master of Arts in Professional Writing Capstones*. Paper 13.

This Capstone is brought to you for free and open access by the Professional Writing at DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Arts in Professional Writing Capstones by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu).

Building a Case for Smaller English Class Sizes

By

Cara Lee Smith

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in  
Professional Writing in the Department of English

In the College of Humanities and Social Sciences of Kennesaw State  
University

Kennesaw, Georgia

2016

College of Humanities & Social Sciences  
Kennesaw State University  
Kennesaw, Georgia  
Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

Cara Lee Smith

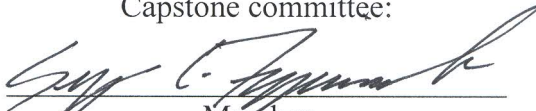
Has been approved by the committee  
for the capstone requirement for

the Master of Arts in Professional Writing  
in the Department of English

May 2016

At the (month and year) graduation

Capstone committee:

  
Member

  
Member

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review .....	1
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	6
Public Perceptions.....	7
Professional Association Class Size Recommendations ...	10
Effects of Increasing Class Sizes for Students.....	15
Assessing Learning Outcomes.....	19
Effects of Class Size on Students' Instructor Reviews.....	21
Strategies for Reducing Class Sizes.....	25
Model Programs.....	29
Summary of Literature Review.....	31
Chapter 2: Case Study.....	33
Background.....	33
Stakeholders.....	35
Goals .....	35
Methodology and Strategy.....	36
Analysis and Suggestions .....	42
Conclusion .....	45
Chapter 3: Developing a Heuristic.....	47
Organizing the Investigation.....	47
The Heuristic.....	48
Applying the Heuristic to the Case Study.....	51
Lessons from Applying the Heuristic to the Case Study .....	60
Chapter 4: Suggestions and Conclusions.....	61
Findings.....	61
Opportunities for Additional Research.....	62
Conclusion .....	65
Works Cited .....	67

## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

When I applied to the Master of Arts in Professional Writing Program (MAPW), I thought I would be devoting the ensuing years of my education to the minutiae of writing: punctuation, words, letters. I entered the program confident that I would succeed because I was focused on ferreting out grammar mistakes and correcting syntax errors.

At the time, I imagined a very narrow field of study, having no understanding of the breadth of questions and issues that Composition Studies scholars were addressing through research and scholarship. Initially focused solely on what I would now call “local issues,” I didn't see the bigger picture – the global issues – until I was deep into my graduate education. Now, after completing my coursework and capstone project, incorrectness seems like a far less serious threat to student writing than I once imagined. Instead, insufficient funding and unfair employment practices experienced by many university instructors seem far more detrimental to student writing.

Since 1962, the U.S. Department of Education has published national educational statistics, trends, and predictions. Most recently they released figures that demonstrate a twenty-four percent increase in full-time college enrollment between the years 2002 and 2012 (U.S. Department of Education n.p.). In the last decade, U.S. college enrollment has negatively correlated to economic growth, so when the economic recession began in

2008, college enrollment numbers soared. Unfortunately, the inverse relationship between economic growth and college enrollment growth creates a situation in which degree-granting institutions have the highest number of students at the same time that they have the least access to public and private funding.

When enrollment increases, universities may consider at least five options for accommodating a growing number of students in classes: 1. do nothing, which limits students' access to needed classes; 2. increase the number of class sections offered and hire additional permanent, tenure-track faculty to teach those classes; 3. increase the number of class sections offered and hire additional contingent faculty to teach those classes; 4. increase the number of class sections offered and hire no additional faculty but increase the teaching load for existing faculty; 5. keep the same number of classes and the same amount of faculty but increase the number of students in each class. Universities may use one of these strategies or a combination of several of these tactics to find a balance between student, faculty, and administrative needs, but each of these options comes with a different price tag and puts a certain amount of strain on a different group. Unfortunately, administrators facing budgetary shortfalls may choose the no-cost or low-cost options that disproportionately burden students struggling to progress to graduation and contingent faculty already responsible for the heaviest teaching loads. When universities face the reality that they must educate more students with less funding, requiring faculty to add a student or two to each class may seem like a reasonable solution. After all, increasing class sizes does not necessitate increasing the salary budget. But for English instructors teaching a 5/5 load (five courses in the fall semester and five courses in the spring semester), adding just two students to each class is tantamount to

adding another class to that instructor's load. While adding one or two students to each class may seem trivial, it can greatly impact the workload of faculty – particularly faculty who have the least recourse.

Because of these growth trends, scholars across disciplines are investigating the effects of class size on faculty and students. While there is a mounting body of research and literature on class size, faculty at many schools have not successfully leveraged the scholarship to force changes to class size policies. Faculty and policy-makers (at both the institutional- and state-level) have not yet agreed upon class size policies acceptable to both sides. Additionally, there is a third group of stakeholders affected by class size – students – whose voices are rarely raised in this discussion. The aim of my capstone project is to explore the ongoing conversation on class size; consider the issues from the three major stakeholders' distinct positions; make recommendations for crafting a rhetorically-focused, research-based approach to investigating class size issues; and draft a collaborative plan to forge alliances between stakeholders and enact institutionally-appropriate class size policy changes.

Like countless other departments at institutions of higher education, the English department at Kennesaw State University (KSU) has increased its class sizes in response to growing demand. Although the official enrollment caps have been increased gradually over the years, class sizes are also growing larger due to over enrollment. For example, the First-Year Composition sequence of ENG 1101 (traditionally taken in the fall semester) and ENG 1102 (traditionally taken in the spring semester) has been enrolled above 100 percent for the past six academic years. Because of increased enrollment, faculty are questioning the effects of larger class sizes. In the 2014-2015 academic year,

the department's inquiry was formalized with the formation of the English Class Size Committee. As a graduate student in the MAPW program, I served as an intern with the English Class Size Committee, whose members were charged with researching the effects of English class sizes on student learning outcomes and faculty workload in order to make recommendations about the optimal class sizes and the acceptable class sizes for department courses. My experience interning for the English Class Size Committee allowed me an opportunity to glimpse the behind-the-scenes work that faculty undertake outside of the classroom in support of the department, college, and university, which was eye-opening. Although I am embarrassed to admit my ignorance, I must confess that before working with this committee I thought class size was just another statistic used by admissions offices to appeal to prospective students; I did not recognize that class size was an important piece of a larger, ongoing discussion concerning faculty workloads, student learning outcomes, state funding, and institutional prestige.

Class sizes are a high stakes issue, but currently the two sides are at a stalemate, with policy makers arguing that reducing class sizes is detrimental to the budget and faculty arguing that increasing class sizes is detrimental to student learning. While both points may be true, perhaps additional research can identify the stakeholders' common ground and provide insights for creative solutions. If English faculty are determined to fight for reduced class sizes, then more focused research on class size is needed. Although there is already an abundant amount of scholarship on the topic, the research is not conclusive nor is it all specific to English Studies.

Until English departments definitively conclude how class sizes affect their faculty and students, scholars must continue to devote more attention (through research,



scholarship, and service) to investigating the direct and indirect effects of class size. In an effort to direct more attention to this topic, I am devoting my capstone project to discovering the best practices for English departments interested in conducting research on class size and offering them a heuristic that could help faculty position themselves to successfully act on their research. Following the organizational model in *Solving Problems in Technical Communication* edited by Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart A. Selber, my thesis includes a literature review, a case study of the English Class Size Committee at KSU, and the development of a heuristic that could be used by English departments at other institutions to guide their class size discussions.

While there are some resources available to guide the discussions of English departments who want to craft an argument to reduce class sizes (for instance KSU's English Class Size Committee turned to Richard Haswell's "Class Sizes for Writing Courses—Regular, Advanced, Honors, and Basic for 310 Institutions" and Alice Horning's "The Definitive Article on Class Size"), faculty would benefit from using a heuristic to thoroughly scaffold their work. Any department undertaking this type of committee work must customize a plan that will make an effective argument for its particular rhetorical situation. I would argue that faculty often view the available guides and the policy recommendations published by professional organizations as conclusive evidence that class size should be reduced, yet simply presenting this documentation to institutional administrators is not enough to create change. If English departments want to explore reducing class sizes, they must be willing to approach the topic as a research problem, using a heuristic; collect the right data; determine assessment techniques particular to their school; and make alliances with students and administrators.

## Literature Review

Considering the many voices participating in the ongoing conversation about class size, productive discussions cannot exist in a vacuum but must be informed by the extensive research, scholarship, and public dialogue surrounding the topic. By reviewing the literature, I have found that the majority of class size scholarship fits into seven sub-topics:

- public perceptions of higher education;
- professional association class size recommendations;
- effects of increasing class sizes for students;
- methods of assessing learning outcomes;
- effects of class size on students' instructor reviews;
- strategies for reducing class size; and
- model programs.

The literature comes from a variety of fields; it is not all particular to English Studies.

Although some of the class size scholarship may be sourced outside of the field, it remains relevant to this discussion because it proves the ubiquitous nature of the topic.

There are myriad questions surrounding the effects of class sizes and seemingly endless variables to test, but by familiarizing themselves with research across divergent fields, English scholars may be able to determine which, if any, effects of class size are universal, and which, if any, are particular to certain disciplines.

Across most of the literature, there seems to be a battle between sides and between numbers, with scholars attempting to locate the exact point of the common

ground where the number of students in each class and the number of minutes worked each semester by faculty are acceptable to all involved parties. At the core of the available scholarship, researchers are striving to find a perfect balance that will be suitable to all of the stakeholders by pinpointing class size policies that will enhance student learning, guarantee fair working conditions for faculty, and ensure the financial health of institutions of higher education. As revealed by the literature review, a panacea has not been found, yet; scholars engaged in class size research are still working toward finding definitive solutions.

### *Public Perceptions*

Because state institutions are partially funded by taxpayer dollars, higher education is a matter of public interest. And as state budgets tighten, public scrutiny draws the discussions of class size and faculty workload outside of the university walls and into the public domain. The political nature of these discussions can also lead to polarization, as seen in one public exchange between a former college administrator, David Levy, and a current college professor, Jill Kronstadt. The debate between Levy and Kronstadt is not merely anecdotal; it highlights some of the common public perceptions about academics and provides context for the broader public discussion about higher education in the United States.

In his opinion piece for *The Washington Post*, Levy contends that establishing a higher education model that is affordable on a middle-class income is essential for American families and that the most reasonable solution for making college more affordable is to increase the faculty teaching workload in non-research institutions. His

claim is that most faculty spend only nine to fifteen hours a week teaching for thirty weeks a year, yet they are paid comparably to other professionals with commensurate education who work forty to fifty hours a week for fifty weeks per year. Levy finds these salaries particularly galling when they are paid with public dollars and believes that taxpayers should get full value out of faculty salaries. To remedy this faculty employment issue, Levy suggests that the higher education community should restructure employment conditions and terms so that teaching faculty are expected to work a forty-hour week – teaching at least twenty hours each week and spending an equivalent amount of time grading and preparing for class each week – for eleven months out of the year. As faculty salaries are consistently the largest portion of most college budgets, Levy believes that making faculty more productive would stave off tuition increases.

Levy's article invited a flurry of responses, including thousands of comments on *The Washington Post* site and longer rebuttals on blogs and online news outlets. While the idea that college should be more affordable may be a popular sentiment among many faculty members, the solution that Levy proposed struck many vocal college instructors as uninformed and unacceptable. One response came from Kronstadt, an associate professor of English at Montgomery College, who published a blog post refuting many of Levy's assertions. As a faculty member at the community college that Levy profiled for his article, she offers additional explanations for some of the "cherry-picked support" used by Levy (Kronstadt). In his article, Levy cites that the average full professor's salary at Montgomery College is \$88,000, which Kronstadt argues to be misleading since only about 25% of the teaching faculty at Montgomery are full-time and, of those, very few are full professors. Kronstadt rebuts that an \$88,000 salary is not representative of the

true average salary for teaching faculty. Further, Kronstadt argues that instructors who teach fifteen hours a week and write substantive comments on papers spend, on average, between thirteen and twenty hours each week on grading alone. In addition to class time and grading, Kronstadt attests that office hours and mandatory committee work push her over the forty-hour mark each week. Ultimately, Kronstadt believes that Levy's article is predicated on a misunderstanding of the work of educators, and he scapegoats faculty who devote unpaid evenings, weekends, and school 'breaks' to ongoing individual instruction, scholarship, research, and professional development.

While this exchange is just one example of the public debate, the two articles underscore the perceptions of each side. On the one hand, taxpayers and political decision-makers call for increasing faculty workload and class size in order to increase efficiency and cost-savings, which may seem like a reasonable plan on the surface. On the other hand, however, faculty push back against this solution because it is unsustainable considering their existing job requirements, which are largely unknown to the general public. Additionally, the focus on accounting for work hours and measuring units of time may be uncomfortable for English faculty. Contrary to public opinion, this discomfort stems not from their lack of productivity but from the scholarship in their field. If English faculty have internalized theories from works as varied as Donald Murray's "The Essential Delay: When Writer's Block Isn't" or Steven Katz's "The Ethic of Expediency: Classical Rhetoric, Technology, and the Holocaust," then the idea that all work could or should be done as efficiently as possible might be incongruous with their professional philosophies. Faculty work is not factory work. It is, however, incumbent upon faculty to find the common language and common ground to explain their work and

their value to the general public since public perception often partially frames administrative decisions.

### *Professional Association Class Size Recommendations*

When questions about class size policy and workload begin to bubble to the surface and English departments begin to seek a standard for higher education English classrooms, they quickly find their professional associations' guidelines. In 1989, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) published a set of guiding principles for composition instructors in response to their members' perception that working conditions for writing faculty were creating a crisis in higher education. Because "quality in education is intimately linked to the quality of teachers," CCCC outlined two major precepts for institutions to follow to ensure that students receive a quality education in composition: committing to professional standards and enacting acceptable teaching conditions (329).

According to CCCC, a commitment to professional standards requires addressing the needs of tenure-line faculty, graduate students, and part-time faculty. Chiefly, CCCC believes that departments should hire full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty to teach the bulk of writing courses, which means that graduate students, part-time faculty, and full-time temporary faculty appointments should not be exploited. In other words, teaching assistantships should be beneficial to graduate students, providing training through an experiential learning opportunity, but CCCC warns that institutions must ensure that they do not take advantage of graduate students as an underpaid labor force (332). Likewise, there are valid reasons for strategically hiring part-time faculty, such as employing them

to teach specialized courses or to fill-in when enrollment numbers are unexpectedly high, but CCCC suggests that institutions of higher education should never allow more than ten percent of composition courses to be taught by part-time faculty (332-4). Additionally, CCCC views full-time temporary positions as unethical and recommends that institutions avoid appointing faculty with this status except under very special circumstances (334-5). With these recommendations, CCCC attempts to secure the highest possible number of full-time positions for its members while advocating for fair hiring practices for all involved in the profession.

CCCC also outlines the teaching conditions necessary to ensure that writing students receive quality education. Specifically, well-supported faculty and instructional resources are requisite for a quality education. The CCCC executive committee lists limitations on class size and faculty workload, the existence of a writing center, instructor access to scholarship and professional development, private space for conferencing with students, and staff support services as necessary conditions enabling sound writing instruction. Regarding class size and workload, CCCC makes the following recommendations:

A. No more than 20 students should be permitted in any writing class.

    Ideally, classes should be limited to 15.

B. Remedial or developmental sections should be limited to a maximum of 15 students.

C. No English faculty members should teach more than 60 writing students a term. In developmental writing classes, the maximum should be 45. (335)

Beginning with the publication of these class size recommendations in 1989, many composition instructors began accepting these figures as the gold standard.

Unfortunately, CCCC does not cite any research they used to develop the class size recommendations in their 1989 policy statement, which calls their methodology into question. Without research or scholarship to substantiate the class size numbers, the recommendations weaken under scrutiny, yet the repetitious recitation of these figures amplifies their perceived importance.

CCCC is not the only professional organization to publish class size and workload recommendations. As the professional association for university and college English departments across the nation, the Association of Departments of English (ADE) works to promote English studies by providing research, resources, and information to member institutions so that English departments can advocate for adherence to best practices in the field. Three years after CCCC published their policy statement, ADE issued a 1992 policy statement, reaffirming their position on class size and workload, as a response to the negative attention being cast on the state of current students and their perceived lack of reading and writing skills (“ADE Guidelines”). ADE takes the position that faculty are not to blame for any deficiencies because they are overworked and overloaded. ADE calls for administrative decision-makers to strive to improve students’ reading and writing skills by heeding the association’s recommendations as they relate to the number of students in composition classes, the number of students in literature courses, the number of faculty instruction hours, the variety of courses that faculty teach, faculty workloads, administrative assignments, and their policies on contingent faculty appointments. By the numbers, this policy recommends that each section of a writing



course should have fewer than fifteen students to be most effective, with an upper limit of twenty; teachers should not have more than sixty composition students in a single semester; literature courses should not have more than thirty-five students; writing-intensive literature courses should not have more than twenty-five students; and undergraduate instructors should not spend more than twelve hours a week engaged in classroom instruction (“ADE Guidelines” n.p.). ADE’s policy statement affirms the positions taken by several other professional associations, including those of CCCC, but the policy statement does not cite any research used to provide support for the recommended class sizes. The particular numbers in ADE’s list of recommendations is not independently verified; their strength comes from mirroring those suggested by CCCC.

Another professional body has made pertinent recommendations on class size: the Association of Writers & Writing Professionals (AWP). As the professional association of creative writing instructors and professionals, AWP has published a list of the common hallmarks representing successful, effective, and innovative undergraduate creative writing programs. As other professional organizations have done, AWP makes several recommendations on structure and focus for institutions to employ in order to achieve their desired student learning outcomes; generally, AWP endorses the adoption of a rigorous curriculum taught by accomplished faculty who receive strong administrative support in combination with robust student support and learning resources (AWP Board of Trustees n.p.). AWP places a primary focus on supporting students with the enforcement of small workshop-style classes. Creative writing faculty should advocate for the smallest of class sizes: “introductory creative writing courses have class size

restrictions equal to or less than an institution's restriction for composition classes (but no greater than 20 students)" and "intermediate and advanced courses have class size restrictions of 12-18 students, with a maximum of 15 students in advanced workshop classes" (AWP Board of Trustees n.p.). Additionally, AWP Board of Trustees states that the optimum class size for a workshop-style course is twelve students (n.p). Unlike CCCC and ADE, AWP does substantiate its numbers, stating that its recommendations are based on a periodic survey of creative writing instructors that the association has conducted since 1972 (AWP Board of Trustees n.p.). While a survey instrument may provide some guidelines for best practices, the results and subsequent recommendations may be somewhat subjective.

Whether or not the professional association policies on class size should be accepted as holy writ, it is clear that KSU's enrollment caps are significantly higher than the published recommendations. The enrollment caps for English courses at KSU are as high as 26 students per composition class, as high as 22 students per creative writing class, and as high as 35 students per class for literature courses, in which writing is also taught. KSU's large class sizes are not an anomaly; reporting on the growing gap between professional association recommendations on composition class size and the actual enrollments found at many colleges, Scott Jaschik's 2009 article "Composition, Overcrowded" profiled fifteen California community colleges whose English faculty are participating in a study on writing class size. The Two-Year College English Association conducted a 2009 survey to collect data on the actual size of composition classes, and these fifteen anonymous community colleges tested the survey instrument before it was distributed nationally ("Composition, Overcrowded"). Jaschik reported that none of the

fifteen colleges in this pilot group were following the class size guidelines recommended by the CCCC.

At KSU, there was a general consensus among the faculty members serving on the committee that the caps for classes taught in the English department were too high and that reducing the class sizes would be beneficial for faculty and students. Because the class size recommendations published by CCCC, ADE, and AWP supported KSU English faculty's consensus, some faculty members seemed confounded by the university's choice to ignore the professional associations. So why are institutions not following the recommendations of professional associations? Are their recommendations unknown to institutional administrators? Or, are their arguments not compelling to institutional administrators?

### *Effects of Increasing Class Sizes for Students*

Perhaps English class sizes are growing because the advantage of increasing class sizes (cost-savings) outweighs the possible negative effects of increasing class sizes. Obviously increasing class sizes increases faculty workload, but how does increasing class size affect student learning?

Reviewing and synthesizing the research on higher education class sizes over a span of more than thirty years, Joe Cuseo identifies eight factors that he defines as detrimental to improving student learning and student retention in his 2007 article "The Empirical Case Against Large Class Size: Adverse Effects on the Teaching, Learning, and Retention of First-Year Students." Drawing heavily from the research of Alexander Astin, Richard Light, and Wibert McKeachie, Cuseo finds that large class sizes: 1.

promote lecture over discussion, 2. reduce the amount of active student participation, 3. lower the likelihood of frequent, substantive feedback from faculty on student work, 4. decrease students' display of critical thinking within classroom discourse, 5. limit the depth of student learning objectives and their assessment through writing, 6. lower perceived and achieved academic performance, 7. reduce students' satisfaction with their higher education experience, and 8. elicit lower evaluations of instructor effectiveness (1-10). While some studies do not find empirical evidence that small classes are better than large classes, Cuseo claims that none argue that large class sizes are actually better for student learning outcomes than small classes and that the vast amount of research he has compiled defends his notion that large class sizes are a detriment to student learning (10). Interestingly, Cuseo also attempts to pinpoint the optimal class size for first-year, general education courses, and his best estimate is fifteen students (11). At this size, he contends, a learning community can be established, engaging students in a more personally meaningful way. Fifteen (or fewer) students is also the ideal number established by CCCC and ADE. The matching figures are not coincidental, nor are they independently established since Cuseo cites the CCCC recommendations as part of the backing for his argument. On the surface, the repeated presence of the number fifteen seems to provide some validation for establishing that particular size as the ideal, but upon closer review, the number seems somewhat arbitrary.

Of course, Cuseo only provides one point of view. Other scholars, such as Sid Gilbert, do not interpret the effects of large classes as detrimental to student learning. In "Quality Education: Does Class Size Matter?" Gilbert questions the view that smaller class sizes are innately better for achieving desired student learning outcomes, regardless

of instructor or student behavior. In a brief review of the literature on class size, Gilbert acknowledges that early research did reveal that smaller classes appeared to be more motivational than larger classes and statistically better for promoting critical inquiry. Also, not insignificant is the fact that many students and faculty seem to prefer small classes. More recent studies, however, “indicate that student attitudes toward large classes are influenced more by course content, organization and instructor ability than by size” (Gilbert 2). Moreover, Gilbert finds that some students do prefer a large class because of the low-pressure atmosphere and the opportunity to work independently and anonymously (3). While many students may prefer small classes, small classes do not guarantee that students will achieve desired learning outcomes. Essentially, Gilbert argues that “what matters is not the size of the class but what goes on in the class” (5). Just as there can be ineffective professors in large classes, so, too, can there be ineffective instructors in small classes. Gilbert’s argument reduces the importance of class size in determining student learning outcomes and focuses on the importance of interactive instructors and engaged students. Yet, it may be more difficult for an instructor to adequately prepare for larger classes if he must devote more time to grading and evaluating a greater number of students and, consequently, less time to preparing for class.

Of course, Cuseo and Gilbert are theorizing class size in general terms, assuming that there are universal truths about the effects of class size on student learning across all disciplines. Although there is not specific scholarship on the effects of large literature courses, scholars in composition studies have united to successfully argue the positive effects of lowering the size of writing classes. One of CCCC’s guiding principles for

teaching postsecondary writing states that “sound writing instruction depends upon frequent, timely, and context-specific feedback from an experienced postsecondary instructor” (“Principles” n.p.). This principle provides a platform from which composition scholars can argue that only smaller classes allow instructors to provide the feedback students require to achieve learning outcomes

In their article “Student Writing: Strategies to Reverse Ongoing Decline,” Michael J. Carter and Heather Harper examine some of the reasons that student writing appears to be declining and changes that could be made to mitigate or reverse that decline. The authors admit that college students’ writing skills have been declining for decades due to changes within the academy and society. While changes in society (such as new technologies and media competing for students’ attention) cannot be combatted easily by choices made by college administrators, the changes in the academy can and should be addressed (Carter and Harper 291). Specifically, Carter and Harper suggest that expanding composition class sizes are responsible for the “decrease in instructor interaction per student, student engagement, and course requirements – all of which have a direct impact on writing ability” (289). Carter and Harper argue that class size is an area of change that can be affected by university policy change, and reversing the trend of growing class size could improve students’ writing by allowing instructors the time to provide substantial feedback to written assignments and revise their courses to emphasize more reading and writing. Carter and Harper successfully argue that college instructors and college administrators are often held responsible for the state of the nation’s writing abilities, yet they actually have very little control over it. Because class size is one area that can be controlled, it ought to be. Here, though, the situation becomes complicated. If

writing instructors campaign for lowering class size based on the promise that it will improve students' writing, then instructors must be prepared to quantify and measure learning outcomes to prove their success.

### *Assessing Learning Outcomes*

While it may be true that writing instructors are more effective when they teach smaller classes, the burden remains on composition scholars to prove it by quantifying learning outcomes that are often subjective. Increasingly, public universities are being asked to prove their worth in terms of metrics. As state governments attempt to run universities like businesses, measurable outcomes are requisite for policy change.

Beginning in the 1990s, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) recognized a shift in policy occurring in which state politicians and legislative bodies started going beyond their historical boundaries for intervention and supervision by intervening on college campuses. Due to their observations, the AAUP's governing council to investigate faculty workload issues, Committee C on College and University Teaching, Research, and Publication, published a report on the political bodies intervening in public higher education. Committee C discovered that the new model of intervention and supervision being adopted at the state-level was akin to micro-management, and managerial-style supervision required institutions of higher education to report on quantifiable measurements of academic productivity and output (48). Committee C, however, contends "that what higher education offers cannot appropriately be described as a product, and is not readily or usefully judged in terms of market-based models of consumer satisfaction or output" (48). Further to this point: regular assessment

of the product of higher education may be simple if there was an innate and quantifiable output, yet the process proves costly – requiring even more bureaucratic dollars and resources – precisely because the construct is not a natural one. Additionally, the AAUP finds that politicians are interested in detailing rules and regulations for faculty workload and hours because politicians believe that units of faculty time are measurable. The focus on management and measurement belie the government’s concern for student learning outcomes. Whereas students need more resources to be successful in college and after college, the AAUP argues that intervention from political bodies does not address the needs of students.

While quantifying learning may not be a natural construct, scholars at one University System of Georgia college were able to construct a research experiment on class size and quantify their measurements. Economics professors J. J. Arias and Douglas M. Walker at Georgia College and State University designed a class-size experiment on four sections (two classes with 25-student caps, two classes with 89-student caps) of the general education course, Economics and Society, during the 2000-2001 academic year. Their research method attempted to control for as many factors as possible, holding the professor, pedagogy, curriculum, and class times consistent in order to isolate class size as the only variable (Arias and Walker 314). Using four multiple-choice examinations as measurement instruments, Arias and Walker’s statistical analysis revealed that the average test scores in the classes with fewer than twenty-five students were seven percentage points higher than the students’ scores in the larger classes (317). While these results may suggest that smaller class sizes positively impact academic performance, Arias and Walker do recognize some weaknesses in broadly interpreting their data. This



experiment was designed for an introductory Economics course, but they encourage other professors to perform similar experiments. If other faculty at different institutions and in different fields performed their own research using highly-similar methods and measurements, perhaps the field of higher education could compare more studies, generalize the results, and form a consensus on the effects of class size based on empirical research. Perhaps composition and literature scholars could replicate parts of Arias and Walker's research design. Although multiple-choice tests are not generally the preferred assessment tool in English courses, it is plausible that they could be redesigned to measure the particular learning outcomes associated with English courses while providing the quantifiable measurements helpful to achieving policy change.

#### *Effects of Class Size on Students' Instructor Reviews*

As English departments explore ways to develop metrics, many turn to the data they have already collected from students: course reviews. There is a substantial amount of literature exploring the complex relationship among student perceptions of faculty instruction, student evaluations of courses and instructors, and class sizes.

Because end-of-course student evaluations are ubiquitous and often used to make career-altering decisions about faculty tenure and promotions, John A. Centra set out to test the reliability of instructor and course evaluations in mirroring student learning outcomes. Cautiously hoping for a moderately high relationship between positive evaluations and educational achievement, Centra designed a study in which college freshman were randomly assigned to instructors in general education courses for two semesters and published his findings in his article "Student Ratings of Instruction and

Their Relationship to Student Learning.” At the end of the courses, students were administered a final examination and a course evaluation. The course evaluation measured the overall rating of the instructor’s teaching effectiveness along with other factors such as the value of the class to the student, the quality of the lectures, perceived faculty-student interactions, successfulness of the course organization and objectives, course difficulty, quality of assignments, and amount of effort put forth by the student (19). Recognizing the limitations of a few small sample groups, Centra found that some factors highly correlated with the results of the examination while others showed lower levels of correlation. The overall teacher effectiveness rating proved to be the best indicator of a positive relationship between student evaluations and student learning. Other variables related moderately well, such as the successfulness of meeting course objectives, while others were not indicative. Student effort, perceived difficulty of the course, and the quality of assignments and readings were weakly correlative (21). In summation, Centra determines that course evaluations may be helpful on the macro-level in assessing the degree to which students achieved a course’s prescribed learning objectives, but they should be considered amongst other pieces of evidence to fully measure an instructor’s ability to teach effectively.

Centra’s finding that students’ course evaluations positively correlate to students’ course learning outcomes contributes to our understanding of course evaluations as reliable metrics. Since course evaluations can be linked to learning outcomes, if course evaluations can also be correlated with class size, then class size and learning outcomes can be measured using course evaluations. In “Where Class Size Really Matters: Class Size and Student Ratings of Instructor Effectiveness,” Kelly Bedard and Peter Kuhn

investigate the correlation between class size and student evaluations of instructors' teaching effectiveness. While many people assume that smaller classes are better, as evidenced by the number of parents paying premium rates for private schools with smaller faculty-student ratios, the review of the literature reveals mixed results in validating this assumption in higher education courses. One reason, Bedard and Kuhn point out, for contradictory research results is the wide variety of performance measurements used to quantify student learning. Across all course levels, disciplines and schools, it is difficult to streamline testing instruments so that results can be compared. Using student evaluations, however, may remedy the issue of disparate testing mechanisms since they can be applied universally (Bedard and Kuhn 254). Bedard and Kuhn acknowledge that there is some disagreement about accepting student evaluations as reliable representations of student learning, but Centra's work helps to alleviate concerns about reliability.

The data collected for Bedard and Kuhn's study came from student evaluations of all economics courses offered at the University of California, Santa Barbara, during a seven-year period. The resulting findings indicate that there is a "large negative impact of class size on student evaluations of instructor effectiveness using a representative sample that encompasses economics courses at all levels," which means that students consistently rate an instructor teaching the smallest-sized class higher than an instructor teaching the largest-sized class, even if that instructor is the same person (Bedard and Kuhn 262). The highest instructor ratings occurred in classes with fewer than twenty students, and the evaluation rating dropped more steeply with each additional student until the class reached eighty students, at which point the ratings seem to be relatively flat

until another steep decline occurs in courses with over 150 students (Bedard and Kuhn 256). Bedard and Kuhn warn administrators that they must consider the sizes of the classes that faculty teach when assessing their evaluations, especially if class size – not teaching effectiveness – is a causal factor in student ratings.

Bedard and Kuhn's findings were reinforced by the work of Lauren Chapman and Larry Ludlow, who investigated similar research questions. In their 2010 article, "Can Downsizing College Class Sizes Augment Student Outcomes? An Investigation of the Effects of Class Size on Student Learning," Chapman and Ludlow discuss the empirical research they collected examining the possible links between class size and students' reported perceptions of their learning. Chapman and Ludlow took data from student evaluations submitted for all courses taught by one instructor at a single university from 1984 to 2007. Upon analysis, the data revealed that "for every student added to a class there is a one-point decrease in the percent of students who report that they 'strongly agree' that they attained the skills associated with learning in that class" (Chapman and Ludlow 112). Another key finding of this study is that while student variables – such as interest, expectations, investment of time, and attendance – and instructor variables – such as availability and overall rating – positively affect perceived student learning, those factors cannot "completely negate the negative effects of larger classes" (Chapman and Ludlow 118). Imposing larger class sizes is, therefore, deleterious to learning outcomes, despite the best efforts of students and instructors. While Chapman and Ludlow recognize the limitations of this study since it only examined one instructor in one department in one university, they do encourage institutions to study their own data to

determine if the cost-cutting measure of raising class sizes has affected perceived student learning.

### *Strategies for Reducing Class Sizes*

Considering the aforementioned studies and professional organization recommendations, how do English faculty craft a compelling argument for reducing class sizes? What additional information will strengthen an English faculty member's rhetorical strategies for building a case to reduce class sizes? Several scholars offer helpful guides for creating an institutional campaign for smaller class sizes, especially for composition classes.

Along with compiling an extensive list of the enrollment sizes for writing classes as reported by numerous institutions across the country, Richard Haswell writes a brief plan for the argumentation techniques required to lower (or retain low) class sizes in his online article "Class Sizes for Regular, Basic, and Honors Writing Courses." Haswell's argument is simple: the warrants are policy, research, and practice. He advocates using the national professional organizations' recommendations, which agree that the best policy on writing class size is to limit classes to twenty students. Additionally, Haswell suggests reminding administrators of the *U.S. News and World Report* preference for smaller class sizes. Research is the second warrant outlined by Haswell, but the backing for this warrant is relatively thin. Haswell points to a few articles, but empirical research does not appear to be the strength of this argument. Finally, Haswell addresses practice as one of the most compelling arguments for smaller writing class sizes. Haswell uses the term 'practice' to mean the common practice of other schools and suggests that

administrators who are persuaded by viewing how the competition operates can view hundreds of other schools' class sizes to see how their writing class sizes compare.

Although Haswell presents a solid argument, it is dismissive of some audience members' needs and does not anticipate the objections that administrators or policy-makers are likely to voice, such as budgetary restrictions and uncertain return-on-investment.

Haswell's other well-known work on class size is titled "Average Time-on-Course of a Writing Teacher." In this article, he estimates the actual time spent by an instructor to conduct a first-year composition class over the course of the semester. His calculations are based on the assumption that twenty-five students are in each class, who must each submit four significantly revised essays, meet once for a required individual conference, and submit a year-end portfolio. Haswell also assumes that the professor will substantially respond to student writing and focus on analysis and argumentation in the assessment of work. While meeting those basic assumptions, Haswell believes his estimate to be very conservative; at a minimum, he calculates that each course requires 231 hours per semester. He breaks that time down into the hours required to read, comment, and grade each paper (4,000 minutes); evaluate in-class work and the portfolio (1,375 minutes); meet for individual conferences (375 minutes); prepare for class (90 hours); and teach the class (45 hours). This detailed accounting of an instructor's time clearly demonstrates how adding just one or two more students exponentially increases the amount of time a writing instructor must commit to each class. If each week of the semester allows forty work hours, then full-time faculty theoretically have 600 total hours of work time available per semester. If a faculty member taught only three sections of first-year composition, each requiring at least 231 hours per semester and had no other

job responsibilities, she would already be working overtime. At this rate, a composition instructor with a 5/5 teaching load, would need to work over 70 hours a week to meet the requirements of his teaching duties.

Writing instructors desperate to illustrate their plight to policy-makers might be tempted to exploit Haswell's enumeration of a composition instructor's time as a visual representation, drawing a direct relationship between class size and faculty workload. Yet, this tactic could also be dangerous. While composition instructors intimately understand that the work required to be a successful writing teacher cannot be quantified in units of hours and minutes, those nuances might be woefully misunderstood by policy-makers. Teaching requires more than time. And reducing the value of an instructor to the number of minutes it takes to complete a task could undermine her worth rather than strengthen her case.

If faculty wish to pursue a discussion about workload along with a discussion about class size, they might also consider utilizing John Ziker's research on faculty time. In "The Long, Lonely Job of Homo Academicus," Ziker discusses the preliminary findings of his TAWKS project (Time Allocation Workload Knowledge Study), which suggest that faculty spend long hours working alone. Surveying faculty volunteers at Boise State University, Ziker's research requires his participants to recall what they have done each day, counting the time they spend working and in what capacity they are working. Although he has just completed the first phase of the research and is not yet drawing comprehensive conclusions, Ziker's early results indicate that professors spend an average of 61 hours working each week, including the weekends. During the traditional workweek (Monday-Friday), faculty spent seventeen percent of their time

attending meetings and thirteen percent of their time responding to email, so thirty percent of their time is spent on work that is not specifically assigned as part of their teaching duties. Comparatively, faculty spent a total of thirty-five percent of their time on more traditional teaching-based activities such as in-class instruction, preparing for class, and course administration and grading. During the workweek, a small percentage of time – less than five percent – could be devoted to research or scholarship. Additionally, the faculty participating in the study reported that they do roughly sixty percent of their work on campus and forty percent at home or at another off-campus location; because of the number of hours that faculty work, however, they still spent nearly a forty-hour week at the university (Ziker n.p.). Finally, Ziker reports that most of the time faculty are working alone: fifty-seven percent of the time they are alone, they work with colleagues seventeen percent of the time, and only fifteen percent of their time is spent working with students. As Ziker's initial findings attest, faculty work is often invisible, happening mostly outside of the classroom and creating the false appearance that faculty have a light workload. Like Haswell's work, Ziker's findings could be leveraged to visually demonstrate faculty time and workload.

Summing up the research on faculty workload and class sizes, Alice Horning's article, "The Definitive Article on Class Size," collects much of the previously published scholarship regarding class size and composition courses and unites it in one source. Horning provides a general line of argument for other writing program administrators to use when fighting for decreased composition class sizes. Her main argument revolves around three premises: 1. smaller class sizes are good for students, 2. smaller class sizes are good for faculty, and 3. smaller class sizes are good for institutions. Further, she



argues that although all subject areas could make claims to support the need for smaller classes, writing classes – particularly first-year composition courses – ought to take priority because the critical reading, analysis, and writing skills acquired in that class underpin virtually all other college courses (Horning 12). To support her points, Horning provides evidence in multiple forms by synthesizing empirical research, enumerating the hourly cost of teaching, restating the recommendations made by professional associations, and addressing the cost-factors often weighed by administrative decision-makers. Horning approaches the issue with a rhetorical lens, assessing the problem from her audience's perspective and addressing its particular needs within the constraints of the context. Although it may be widely agreed upon that smaller class sizes are always better, administrators must consider cost-effectiveness when making decisions. Horning urges institutions to view the bigger picture when considering class size, so she lists the cost-benefits of smaller class sizes such as gaining higher national rankings and retaining more students to entice universities to look at the long-term effects of smaller classes (23). Horning's approach to the class size problem is more thorough than any other scholar's previous treatment of the topic, but one area that she does not explore is the role of the student in the class size discussion.

### *Model Programs*

In order to involve the thoughts and perceptions of real students affected by class size issues, we must turn to a couple of model programs that have experimented with lowering class sizes. Institutions like the University of Central Florida and Arizona State

University have created pilot programs that serve as test sites for collecting data that can be used to help build similar or improved programs at other colleges.

Greg Glau's presentation on the Project 85 initiative at Arizona State University (ASU) chronicles the Department of English's implementation of a presidential challenge to increase student success and retention and, by doing so, increase the university's ranking to the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile in *U.S. News and World Report*. Although the president's impetus might have been national rankings and recognition, the Department of English was pleased to add more than twenty full-time, benefitted, instructor positions, hiring several adjunct faculty who had previously been working under part-time, semester-to-semester contracts. To measure the outcomes of lowering first-year composition classes from 26 students to 19 students, the department assessed pass rates, drop-withdraw-failure rates, student evaluations of instructors, and continuation rates (moving from ENG 101 in the fall to ENG 102 in the following spring semester). Following the implementation of Project 85, the results show that the first year of reduced class sizes produced 1. a higher pass rate in ENG 101 and ENG 102 than in the previous five academic years and 2. a lower rate of students dropping, withdrawing, or failing than in the previous five academic years. Additionally, student evaluations of 100-level instructors improved over the previous six semesters, and the continuation rate was higher than the previous five years (Glau n.p.). Overall, the initiative succeeded in improving student success and retention in first-year writing.

In 2009, the University of Central Florida (UCF) began a similarly successful program. The university started the process by performing an internal analysis on class size and determined that lowering class sizes for first-year courses would not make a

difference for retention and progression, except in the case of freshman algebra and first-year composition. With special funding coming from an increased undergraduate tuition rate, the university began a pilot program to lower class sizes in first-year composition and algebra. The previous enrollment cap for first-year composition had been twenty-seven students; the program lowered some classes to twenty-five students and others to nineteen. The English department received funding to hire six full-time, teaching-focused faculty members to close the gap and fully-staff the program. The new first-year composition program is rhetorically-focused and designed to enhance the transfer of writing skills across the curriculum. The program has demonstrated quantifiable success; a qualified panel of readers has assessed samples of student portfolios, compared them to previous student work, and found that “the new curriculum consistently outperformed the old curriculum and that the nineteen-student classes using the new curriculum performed best on measures of higher-order thinking” (“Increasing Student Success” n.p.). The program at UCF has been successful not only because of decreased class sizes but also because of the support of administration and the investment in hiring high-quality educators. The model pilot programs provide hope that it is possible to convince administrators at public universities to experiment with decreasing class size to improve learning outcomes and increase retention.

### *Summary of Literature Review*

The current body of literature broadly addresses class size issues across multiple disciplines. Generally, the research shows that smaller classes may be more beneficial to students, but the findings are not as conclusive as many scholars would prefer. The

literature review reveals several underdeveloped areas of research and underscores the need for:

1. large-scale, conclusive studies on the ideal class sizes for composition courses, literature courses, and other English department courses;
2. definitive methodologies for measuring learning in humanities courses;
3. recommendations for engaging state and institutional administrators; and
4. strategies for involving students in the class size discussion.

While class size discussions are occurring nationally across different fields at many institutions, addressing the issues will happen at the local level. Individual departments must conduct their own research and experiments to determine the best approaches for examining class size. As the literature suggests, there is not a straightforward guide to understanding all of the effects of class size or a template to follow for reducing class sizes. Absent of research that prescribes the exact, ideal number of students necessary for an optimal learning environment in each type of English course, those who desire to lead a class size investigation at their universities must piece together their own blueprint for building an argument. In the next chapter, I will explore how one institution (Kennesaw State University) attempted to explore the topic through committee work.

## **Chapter 2: Case Study**

### **Background**

While full-time student enrollment has increased at colleges and universities across the country in the last decade, growth at Kennesaw State University (KSU) has far outpaced the national average. In the eight years between fall 2007 and fall 2015, KSU's enrollment increased sixty-five percent. Some of this enrollment growth can be attributed to the state of the national economy: as the unemployment rate rises, the educational enrollment rate rises, as well, with people returning to school to receive additional education or training in fields that are still hiring. And while the economic downturn certainly affected the enrollment numbers at KSU, the recession is not the only factor to consider when examining the university's growth. During fall 2013, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia (USG) announced that it would consolidate Kennesaw State University and Southern Polytechnic State University (SPSU), resulting in one merged institution named Kennesaw State University by fall 2015.

Before the consolidation was announced, KSU was already the fastest-growing USG institution and was actively facing issues like increased class sizes and space constraints. While faculty and administrators were still trying to find solutions to address the problems created by rising enrollment numbers, a new set of questions emerged as the reality of the impending merger loomed. Bringing together the two institutions, with a combined enrollment of 33,000 students, presented many challenges. KSU's and SPSU's

Presidents formed committees known as operational working groups (OWGs) in every unit to address the foreseeable political and logistical issues created by the consolidation. Ultimately, two universities with two different cultural identities had to be joined.

When the consolidation was announced, many programs existed on only one campus, but both institutions housed English departments. At KSU, the Department of English is the largest department on campus, which is unsurprising considering that the university was historically a junior college specializing in providing general education courses. Today, the department's 70+ full-time faculty members and 50+ part-time faculty members are responsible for teaching nearly every undergraduate student on campus in three general education courses (two composition courses and one literature course) along with teaching course requirements for undergraduate English majors and minors and graduate students. At SPSU, which was historically a technical institute, the Department of English, Technical Communication, and Media Arts (ETCMA) had a much smaller faculty but was responsible for teaching the majority of the required, liberal arts general education courses for the entire student body. Additionally, there were several majors offered through ETCMA, but those majors had relatively low enrollment numbers. ETCMA rebranded itself as the Department of Digital Writing and Media Arts (DWMA) in spring 2014, which helped differentiate it from the existing English department at KSU. During this time (as a result of consolidation), it was unclear if administrators would allow these departments to remain independent or if faculty and programs would need to merge.

The months preceding final consolidation were filled with uncertainty. In the transitional climate of fall 2014, the chair of KSU's English department formed a

committee to investigate whether English class sizes at KSU were too large. The ad hoc committee of twelve would work throughout the academic year, meeting monthly to formulate a report in response to their charge. As a graduate student, I served as an intern to this committee. My main tasks were to provide research support, serve as the secretary of the committee, and aid the committee chair with organizing materials and designing documents.

### **Stakeholders**

The outcome of the committee's work would directly impact two groups: English faculty and students taking classes in the English department. Although English faculty and students are the primary stakeholders in this case, the work of the committee was rhetorically crafted for a third party: the Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Ultimately, the conclusions of the committee were drafted for his consideration, despite his indirect relationship to the subject. While there are three distinct groups of stakeholders in this situation, only faculty participated in the committee work. The committee consisted of twelve faculty members representing different English disciplines such as literature, linguistics, theory, professional writing and rhetoric, and creative writing. Of the twelve voting members, eight are tenure-track professors and four are full-time lecturers; part-time faculty were not involved with the committee's work.

### **Goals**

The English Class Size Committee was tasked with determining whether the English classes at KSU were an appropriate or inappropriate size, making

recommendations on class enrollment caps based on research, and presenting its findings to the department's faculty. Assuming the recommendations gained the support of the full faculty and the chair of the department, the recommendation report would be sent to the Dean of the College for consideration. Finally, the committee's ultimate goal was to convince the Dean to act by creating policies to adjust English class enrollment caps based on the committee's findings.

### **Methodology and Strategy**

The committee's method for determining whether KSU's current English class sizes were too large was threefold: 1. consider the class size guidelines proposed by national professional associations, 2. survey the department's faculty for input, and 3. research class size at peer institutions. Structurally, the committee's primary strategy was framed by the arguments of Richard Haswell and Alice Horning, who suggest concentrating on policy, research, and practice when advocating for smaller class sizes. Along with Haswell's and Horning's strategies, the committee built their argument by focusing on student retention and progression. Believing that administrators would want to see quantifiable measurements, committee members focused on collecting data, using numbers to strengthen and legitimize their work. Additionally, the committee members made the strategic decision to advocate for lower class sizes on behalf of faculty and students; they did not want it to appear as though they were selfishly fighting for smaller classes simply to reduce their own workloads. From the outset, the English Class Size Committee designed their research and methodology to support a strategic argument and a rhetorical report.



The focus on quantifiable measurement shaped the design of the faculty survey, which the committee designed and distributed through Qualtrics Survey Software to all English faculty, including full-time and part-time faculty on both the Kennesaw and Marietta (former SPSU) campuses. The survey posed nine questions, and 45% of faculty responded. Although the survey was anonymous, participants were asked to identify their primary campus affiliation because of the different politics and policies pertaining to each campus. The primary purpose of the survey was to gather data on faculty opinions of the “ideal (optimal)” and “maximum acceptable” English class sizes and compare their current KSU course sizes to those numbers. The terminology the committee chose to use to categorize class sizes was “ideal (optimal)” and “maximum acceptable.” These terms were suggested by the Chair of the English department and were derived from the language used by CCCC in their recommendations. Additionally, the committee hoped to gather qualitative data regarding pedagogical practices for classes of different sizes and the effects of different pedagogical practices on students. Specifically, the faculty survey contained the following questions:

Question 1: On which campus have you been teaching?

Question 2: If you routinely teach one or more of the course types [Gen Ed

Writing; Gen Ed Literature; Gen Ed Literature (large-enrollment sections);

Intro to English Studies and Senior Seminar; Sophomore Literature Surveys;

Upper-level Literature, Linguistics, Literary Theory; Writing-Intensive

Literature or Linguistics; Film; Undergraduate Creative Writing;

Undergraduate Rhetoric and Applied Writing] listed below, please tell us

- a. What is the *ideal (optimal)* number of students in each class?

- b. What is the *maximum acceptable* number of students in each class?

Question 3: If you had *ideal (optimal)* numbers of students enrolled in your courses, would you change your pedagogical or class delivery methods? If so, what would you do differently?

Question 4: How would these changes affect students?

Question 5: If you had the *maximum acceptable* numbers of students enrolled in your courses, would you change your pedagogical or class delivery methods? If so, what would you do differently?

Question 6: How would these changes affect students?

Question 7: If you had *more than the maximum acceptable* numbers of students enrolled in your courses, would you change your pedagogical or class delivery methods? If so, what would you do differently?

Question 8: What effects of student learning, class attrition rates, and failure rates do you believe come from enrollment *over ideal (optimal)* numbers?

Question 9: Do you have any additional comments on class size?

The data collected through the survey was interpreted to illustrate a variety of points, but the two major pieces of information highlighted by the English Class Size Committee were that 80% of faculty believed they were teaching at least one course with more than the maximum acceptable number of students enrolled and that 88% of faculty reported they would change their pedagogical style to focus more on writing, provide more individualized instruction, improve the quality and frequency of feedback, and invite more student discussion if teaching classes of an ideal size.

While collecting the data from the KSU English Faculty Survey, the committee members also surveyed other institutions about their class sizes for comparison. The committee felt that the best comparisons could be drawn between KSU and other USG institutions as well as between KSU and the universities identified as peer and aspirational institutions according to Carnegie Classification. There was not a formal survey instrument designed for this purpose, but each committee member was assigned a group of institutions to contact to request their English class size data.

Many committee members were familiar with the class size recommendations of the professional associations representing their particular disciplines. Literature faculty knew the MLA policies, composition faculty were familiar with CCCC's standards, and creative writing faculty were aware of the AWP guidelines. Compiling and averaging the class size numbers from the separate organizations revealed that the associations generally agreed on an acceptable range for each course type, and KSU's enrollment caps and workload policies were well above the range deemed acceptable.

Comparing KSU's current English class sizes to the ideal and acceptable class sizes reported in the faculty survey, the average class sizes reported by other universities, and the class sizes recommended by professional associations, the committee determined that the collected data suggested that English class sizes at Kennesaw State University were too large. Because class sizes were comparatively large, the committee concluded that the course enrollment caps should be lowered. Broadly, the data did support the committee's recommendations, but a close examination of the research reveals a more compelling argument for class size reduction in some course types over others.

Here, the committee made a strategic decision to advocate for smaller class sizes across the board. As the literature review revealed, professional association guidelines strongly recommend smaller writing classes, as does some scholarship; however, there have not been any studies published to support a case for lowering enrollment caps for literature courses. Regardless, the committee determined that they would recommend a reduction in enrollment caps across all English courses taught at KSU. Specifically, the committee recommended the following enrollment caps for each course type:

- General Education writing: 19 students;
- Lower-level creative writing: 20 students;
- Upper-level creative writing: 15 students;
- Lower-level rhetoric and professional writing: 20 students;
- Upper-level rhetoric and professional writing: 15 students;
- Writing-intensive literature and linguistics: 20 students;
- General Education literature (other than Honors sections): 25 students;
- Large-enrollment sections of General Education literature: 39 students;
- Introduction to English Studies: 16 students;
- Senior Seminar: 16 students;
- Sophomore literature surveys: 24 students;
- Upper-level literature, linguistics, and literary theory: 21 students; and
- Film: 27 students.

These recommendations were largely based on the average ideal (optimal) class sizes reported in the faculty survey, with the exception of the upper-level creative writing recommendation. Faculty reported that the ideal size for undergraduate creative writing

classes was 17 students, but the committee lowered the recommendation to 15 based on the AWP recommendations. It is also important to note that the committee's report states that it "recommends lowering the maximum number of students enrolled in all English Department courses;" however, the actual numbers suggested would increase the enrollment cap for Senior Seminar classes by one student from the current cap and would leave the enrollment cap the same for writing-intensive literature, linguistics, and theory courses at 20 students.

With the recommendations determined, the committee members began strategizing about crafting the most rhetorically effective method of presenting their recommendations to reduce class sizes. As their deadline approached and the committee's monthly meetings turned into biweekly meetings, discussions about rhetorical strategies occurred at each gathering. With its administrative audience in mind, the committee decided that the recommendation document for the Chair and Dean would be most effective if written as an executive summary, limited to a few pages with visual elements like bulleted lists and tables; the writing style would be persuasive yet straightforward (in technical communication fashion), calling the report's administrative audience to action. The committee determined that the presentation to the full faculty would be adapted from the formal recommendation report, but no written work was composed with the faculty audience in mind.

Following two departmental meetings, the faculty and chair of the English department officially approved the recommendations of the committee, which sent the report to the Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Currently, no

changes have been made to course enrollment caps as a result of the English Class Size Committee's work.

### **Analysis and Suggestions**

By evaluating this case, I am trying to determine whether KSU's English Class Size Committee would serve as a good model for English departments at other institutions who are investigating class sizes. Specifically, I will examine whether the committee's structure and strategies successfully supported its goals and whether others undertaking a similar purpose could expect to accomplish their goals by employing the same structure and strategies.

First, did the committee achieve its goals? The KSU English Class Size Committee had multiple goals, which it achieved with varying levels of success. The committee met its first objective by determining that English class sizes at KSU were unacceptably large compared to the professional association guidelines, the class sizes at peer and aspirational institutions, and the average acceptable class size reported by KSU faculty. The committee successfully agreed on strategies for recommending an across-the-board reduction in class sizes and gained consensus from the full faculty and chair of the department. The committee, however, has fallen short of its ultimate goal: convincing administrators to enact changes to lower English class sizes. Why did the committee's work stall at this point? Of course, factors outside of the committee's control, such as budgetary issues or consolidation-related matters, may have affected the outcome, but perhaps there were also flaws in the committee's structure or strategies that prevented it from fully realizing its goals.

Upon a close examination of the case, I see a major incongruence between the stakeholders in this situation and the committee's makeup. Whereas there are three groups of stakeholders – faculty, students, administrators – who are affected by English class sizes, only one group enjoys representation on the committee. The faculty committee members spent a considerable amount of time trying to author their recommendations not only from their own perspective but also from their students' perspective. Similarly, the faculty tried to imagine the administrators' perspective as an audience of the recommendation report. Although, according to Walter Ong, an author's audience will always be fictitious to some degree, excluding committee membership for two of the three stakeholder groups ensured that the real arguments and counterarguments of students and administrators were left imagined – or unimagined – by the faculty.

Because the committee consisted of only faculty, the members all had similar perspectives. Although they did not agree on every detail of the reasoning or argument, they all wanted smaller English classes. No one proposed keeping the status quo, and no one wanted larger courses. Unfortunately, the committee members' common perspective may have prevented some critical questioning about the research problem and the purpose of the committee. From the committee's perspective, discovering that KSU's English classes were demonstrably larger than they ought to be naturally led to the conclusion that course enrollment caps should be lowered to be more in line with comparable institutions. Because the data collected by committee members supported the hypothesis that class sizes were larger than the ideal number, the committee immediately assumed that they should advocate for lowering the class size numbers. This conclusion was accepted without discussions about the consequences of successfully reducing class

sizes. Perhaps if the committee's membership had been more diverse, a dissenting voice might have forced the committee to answer some difficult questions, such as: Could reducing English class sizes reduce access to education for some students? Could reducing English class sizes require students to extend the length of time it takes to graduate, creating more financial burden? Could reducing English class sizes require contingent faculty to teach additional classes? Would it lighten the workload for some while adding a heavier teaching load for others? Although these questions may be part of a larger philosophical discussion concerning the costs and benefits of higher education, the committee's argument would have been strengthened and honed if it had been forced to address these issues.

The premise of forming the committee was to perform an investigation to determine whether English class sizes were too large, but the committee never stated what problem the possibly-too-large classes were causing. Without a specified research problem, the committee's work had little exigency and, thus, could not gather the power to influence people outside of the English department. Unfortunately, it seemed as though the department did have a problem caused by the high number of students enrolled in each English classes that they did not want to directly state: the problem that faculty workloads were becoming too heavy to bear. Although the issue of workload was ever-present in committee discussions, it received very little attention in the final recommendation report. The committee seemed hesitant to focus on that problem for fear of seeming self-serving, but acknowledging that there was a problem severe enough to necessitate committee action would provide a greater sense of urgency.



Additionally, because the research problem was not clearly defined, it was difficult for the committee to design research. While interning for the committee, I was responsible for collecting and interpreting the data from the survey, which was a considerable undertaking. I spent weeks sifting through the data, finding trends in faculty attitudes about their class sizes and workloads to determine that faculty felt that they were teaching too many students. While the survey provided an opportunity for all faculty to participate in the process and voice their opinions, the results did not prove anything. With a clearer objective, the committee's time could have been better spent on designing research that would result in the type of quantifiable measurements that they believed would strengthen their case.

## **Conclusion**

While the committee produced good work that could be modeled at other institutions, three major factors would have improved their success: 1. inviting students and administrators to be active participants in discussions on class size, 2. identifying an institution-specific research problem caused by class size that would provide exigency for the committee's research and work, and 3. designing a research methodology and instrument that directly investigates the research problem. The current conversation about class size at KSU represents an imbalanced, hierarchical system in which students have no voice and no decision-making powers, some faculty may have a voice but still have no decision-making powers, and administrators have all the decision-making powers yet do not often join the conversation. Unfortunately, the imbalanced structure of this conversation does not demonstrate a system of shared governance, which is valued by the

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), KSU's accrediting agency.

According to the SACS Commission on Colleges, shared governance is integral to the tradition of higher education in the U.S., so the accrediting agency recognizes its importance in establishing and maintaining educational programs (54). By advocating for shared governance, SACS urges institutions under its purview to open their decision-making processes to include all who are willing to participate.

Large class sizes simultaneously solve problems in education, like addressing budgeting and staffing shortages, and create problems in education, like inflicting heavier workloads for faculty and disengaging students. If, however, invested stakeholders from each constituency group could meet to deliberately evaluate class sizes, then creative, mutually beneficial solutions might arise.

## **Chapter 3: Developing a Heuristic**

### **Organizing the Investigation**

If English departments ought to form committees to investigate class sizes at their institutions, how should they embark on organizing and structuring these committees? An English class size committee's work is rhetorical in nature. Once a problem is stated, the committee must systematically work its way through the five canons of rhetoric to meet its charge: from inventing solutions through research and discussion to delivering final recommendations that will appeal to various audiences. Because this work is rhetorical, it must be composed methodically, not unlike a piece of persuasive writing. Using a heuristic specifically designed to guide the process of structuring the committee and inform the committee's decision-making helps provide the organization necessary to construct a successful argument. In this chapter, I develop a heuristic based on the lessons presented by the case study of KSU's English Class Size Committee that could be used by other English departments who are facing similar questions about class sizes.

The heuristic I have designed is a set of ten questions that are meant to prompt discussion among stakeholders, challenge underlying assumptions about class sizes, promote an investigation of class size that will help contribute to the existing research and scholarship on the topic, and help stakeholders arrive at an acceptable and actionable consensus in response to concerns about class sizes. Like other heuristics that prompt rhetoricians to address the who, what, when, where, and why of any given rhetorical

situation (or, in Kenneth Burke's terms, the agent, act, scene, agency, and purpose of the situation), this heuristic requires that committee members answer those questions along with some other logistical questions both before forming a committee and while engaging in committee work.

### **The Heuristic**

Before forming a committee, responsible parties should ask themselves the first five questions in the heuristic to help structure the committee in a way that will support its stated goals. The first subset of questions prompts those considering the formation of a committee to narrow their focus:

*Question 1: What is our purpose?*

- *Why are we forming a committee?*
- *Does this committee have more than one purpose? If so, should we organize subcommittees, task forces, or an additional ad hoc committee?*

*Question 2: What is the specific problem we are trying to solve?*

- *Can this problem be framed as a research problem?*

*Question 3: Who is affected by the problem?*

- *Who are the stakeholders in this situation (e.g.: faculty, students, administrators)?*
- *Which stakeholders should be consulted?*
- *Which stakeholders should be voting members of the committee?*

- *Can we create strategic partnerships with any other on-campus departments or groups (e.g.: General Education Council, Office of the Dean of Students, Student Retention Services)?*

*Question 4: What institutional factors provide context for this work?*

- *How does place affect the situation? What are the institution's priorities (e.g.: teaching, graduation rates), and how might our department's work support those priorities?*
- *What factors contributed to setting the current course enrollment caps?*

*Question 5: What is the timeframe for completing this work?*

- *Do we have specific deadlines to meet?*
- *How much time will members need to devote to this committee?*

After committee members are chosen, the committee should consider the following five questions as they plan research, interpret data, and present the findings. This second subset of questions is designed to expand the conversations and ideas surrounding the narrowly defined committee purpose, provoking dialogue among stakeholders.

*Question 6: How will we conduct our research to investigate the problem?*

- *What type of preliminary research should we conduct prior to formalizing the research plan?*
- *What human resources or funding are available to the committee?*
- *Do we have a hypothesis to test?*
- *What type of study is best utilized to examine our research problem?*

*Question 7: How might our research fit into the larger body of scholarship?*

- *Do other institutions or scholars have any on-going research that we might join?*
- *Are there any existing research designs that we could adopt or adapt?*

*Question 8: What does the data of our study reveal?*

- *How do we interpret the collected data?*
- *Does the data support the hypothesis or negate it? How strong is the evidence?*
- *What specific pieces of research are informing our recommendations?*
- *What are the possible consequences of following the recommendations of the committee? What are the possible consequences of not following the recommendations?*

*Question 9: How do we do communicate our findings?*

- *Who is the audience for the findings?*
- *What are the most effective delivery methods for that audience in terms of style, media, and mode?*

*Question 10: If the findings urge action, what are the next steps?*

- *How do we organize follow-up action?*

Although the questions in the heuristic may seem simplistic or obvious, they should help provide a straightforward guide that will ensure measured action, deliberate decision-making, and mindful discussion.

### **Applying the Heuristic to the Case Study**

By applying the heuristic to KSU's English Class Size Committee, it becomes clear how systematically addressing each question might provide better structural organization and better results for a committee undertaking the investigation of an issue like class size. In this section, I will apply the heuristic to the case study to demonstrate how this tool could be used to produce committee work that would be more focused and better informed, thus creating a more appealing rhetorical argument.

*Question 1:* What is our purpose?

*Case Study Response:* The committee chose to determine whether the English class sizes at KSU were too large, make recommendations on class enrollment caps based on research, present findings to the department's faculty, and convince the Dean of the College to act by creating policies to reduce English class enrollment caps.

*Analysis:* The initial question in the heuristic asks those considering the formation of a committee to begin with stating the goal of the potential committee. It is clear from the laundry list of goals that KSU's English Class Size Committee tried to achieve that their mission was too broad. Starting with just this initial question in the heuristic, the path forward for the committee might have been very different if it had been forced to narrowly define its mission prior at the outset. One major problem the committee faced was that the goals set forth at its formation predetermined the outcome of its research. While the committee was formally charged with determining whether class sizes were too large, the stated goal of convincing the Dean to lower class sizes presupposes that class sizes are too large. If this conclusion has been predetermined, then how valid is the

committee's research? This presupposition calls into question the objectivity of the committee members, undermining their credibility and ethos.

As this question elucidates, there is more than one purpose for the committee, so perhaps there should have been more than one committee. If the work had been divided into two committees, one committee could have been charged with investigating the class size issue through research, and a second committee – if necessary, based on the findings of the first committee – could have been charged as a task force.

*Question 2:* What is the specific problem we are trying to solve?

*Case Study Response:* Not specified.

*Analysis:* As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, the lack of a stated research problem created a situation in which the committee could not prove what the exigency was for reducing class sizes. Yes, KSU's English course enrollment caps might be too high in comparison to the standards recommended by professional organizations, but what problem is that causing? Are the relatively large class sizes negatively affecting student learning outcomes? Are they negatively affecting faculty productivity? Without stating a research problem, it is difficult to formulate a research plan. This question is designed to further narrow the focus of the committee and to help pinpoint the necessity of the committee's work.

*Question 3:* Who is affected by the problem?

*Case Study Response:* The committee spoke for themselves as faculty, and they imagined the problems that large class sizes might create for students. Additionally, they



recognized that administrators play a role in setting class sizes but seemed to agree that administrators have an indirect relationship to any problems created by large class sizes.

*Analysis:* In the case study, the committee was comprised solely of faculty members. And while the committee did consider that students were also directly affected by problems presented by large English class sizes, they did not fully address the heuristic question since faculty was the only stakeholder group invited to participate in the process. The purpose of this third question in the heuristic is to spur a stakeholder analysis before finalizing committee membership. During this analysis, the main stakeholders would be identified, and their level of involvement would be determined. In this case, since there are three groups of stakeholders – students, faculty, and administration – there might be varying levels of engagement. Perhaps representatives from some groups are consulted but are not deemed voting members of the committee, or perhaps ex-officio members might be invited to serve on the committee, if their presence would provide an additional assurance of legitimacy or stakeholder cooperation. Depending on an institution's specific rhetorical situation, committee membership could be adjusted to appropriately represent the stakeholders. Considering the different voices, ideas, and perspectives from each stakeholder group is essential to organizing a committee that can fully understand and investigate class size issues.

*Question 4:* What institutional factors provide context for this work?

*Case Study Response:* With rapid enrollment growth over the last several years, KSU has chosen to accommodate more students in English classes by overenrolling course sections and hiring additional part-time instructors, rather than creating long-term

solutions like hiring more permanent faculty members. Additionally, the merger with SPSU has brought faculty issues, like equitable workloads and comparable tenure and promotion policies, to the surface.

*Analysis:* This question addresses the rhetorical need to locate the problem and define the background that influences the problem. The English Class Size Committee discussed institutional context at length because of the unique nature of the merger and university's growth rate. Discussions about place and how KSU compared to other institutions and their similarities and differences continuously colored the way that faculty understood their particular rhetorical situation. Although the committee engaged in multiple conversations in which they contextualized the problems of growing class sizes, the state of uncertainty during spring 2015 made it difficult to fully comprehend the changing identity of the university. Of course, work goes on amidst flux, but ultimately, the committee was probably disadvantaged by the institutional climate at the time it was conducting its work. Because of the breadth of administrative issues to resolve through consolidation, it may have been easier for administrators to dismiss the importance of the class size recommendations while facing other pressing concerns. So although the committee fully addressed this question and comprehended the context in which they were working, their thorough understanding was undermined by the larger rhetorical situation. Hopefully, committees at other institutions examining class size will not have to compete for administrative attention under the same circumstances as KSU's English department.

*Question 5:* What is the timeframe for completing this work?

*Case Study Answer:* As an ad hoc committee, members understood that they were to complete the committee work within the academic year, but the actual deadline for finishing the recommendation report became clear only once it was quickly approaching.

*Analysis:* Although the committee had been formed during fall 2014, the survey instrument to be sent to all KSU faculty was not finalized until the beginning of spring 2015. The committee's goal was to compile the results of the survey and other research into a recommendation report, which would be presented to the full English faculty for a vote by the end of spring semester. Because of the specific nature of the department's procedural meeting rules, the presentation of recommendations had to occur at least twice before it could be put up for a vote and subsequently approved by the department chair and submitted to the dean. With the monthly faculty meetings dictating the timeline for completion of the document, the committee was under a tight deadline for performing the bulk of its tasks and had only six weeks from the time that the surveys were sent to the time that the final recommendation document was presented to the department's faculty.

There was a sense of urgency pushing the committee to complete its work, which – in hindsight – seems misplaced. While the committee rushed to interpret data and write the report, the Dean's office has not shown any urgency in responding to the committee's recommendations. Instead of hastening the research process to meet an arbitrary deadline, perhaps the committee should have created a comprehensive and deliberate research plan to thoroughly gather empirical evidence to support their claims. If more time and resources were invested in an extended study, the results may have garnered more attention.

*Question 6:* How will we conduct our research to investigate the problem?

*Case Study Response:* The English Class Size Committee surveyed all faculty to gauge their opinions on the ideal and acceptable sizes for English course enrollment caps and synthesize this information with other research to demonstrate that English class sizes were too large at KSU.

*Analysis:* The committee's restricted time and financial resources limited the amount of preliminary research that they could conduct prior to designing their study. Although the committee had a graduate student at its disposal, her reading and research was done after the survey was administered, not before. Additionally, most of the committee members were familiar with the professional organizations' recommendations on class size and pedagogical best practices, but the other scholarship and research studies particular to class size did not appear to influence the committee's research design. If the committee had the opportunity to conduct more preliminary research and consider its approach to its particular research problem in comparison to others' approaches, the committee may have chosen a different type of study.

Because of the university's growing focus on measurable outcomes and data-based decisions, KSU's English Class Size Committee purposely designed a faculty survey instrument that would collect quantitative data. Committee members felt that collecting numbers would bolster their argument for an administrative audience. The responses to the faculty survey did provide numerical data; but unfortunately, the survey was not designed to test a specific hypothesis, so the numbers did not measure or prove a particular outcome. While the survey provided an opportunity for faculty to voice their

expert opinions on English class sizes, it did not serve as the type of unbiased, empirical study that could demonstrate a need to change class sizes. Furthermore, if the committee had more time, they could have implemented a usability testing phase before administering the survey. A testing phase might have revealed some of the survey's weaknesses and prompted the committee to revise their research methodology. Ultimately, the committee's research might have yielded better results if they had the time and resources to ask the heuristic questions and methodically approach the planning of each phase of their work.

*Question 7:* How might our research fit into the larger body of scholarship?

*Case Study Response:* Not specified.

*Analysis:* By not asking itself this question, the committee missed an opportunity to build on some of the existing scholarship on class size. While the committee surveyed KSU's peer and aspirational institutions to learn more about their English class sizes, the committee members did not seek and contact scholars who had done similar work. If the committee had performed more preliminary research prior to designing the survey instrument sent to faculty, they may have opted to test some of the existing research designs that have been published on the topic. The committee could have designed a research experiment similar to the one conducted by Economics professors J. J. Arias and Douglas Walker at Georgia College and State University, adapted for English courses. Building on their results might help begin to construct the type of large-scale research needed to determine the effects of class size. Additionally, the English Class Size Committee might have campaigned to test a pilot program at KSU like those started at

UCF or ASU. Although this research avenue would require more financial resources and buy-in from administrators, a pilot program testing classes of various sizes and employing various pedagogical methodologies might provide the clearest results of how class sizes impact student learning and faculty effectiveness.

*Question 8:* What actions do the outcomes of our study suggest?

*Case Study Response:* The outcomes of the committee's research indicated that class sizes were too high, according to faculty input and institutional comparison. The committee, therefore, recommended an across the board reduction in English class sizes.

*Analysis:* During this step of the process, the English Class Size Committee suffered from a form of groupthink that caused the collected data to be interpreted too broadly as proof of the need for smaller English class sizes, resulting in recommendations that were not fully supported by evidence. The heuristic is designed to mitigate the tendency to submit to groupthink because it forces the group to pause, take account of all possible options and outcomes, and proceed in decision making with a variety of perspectives in mind. This heuristic question calls for an internal debate; it requires the committee to take a critical look at the value of its data, question its interpretations and assumptions, and weigh the consequences of all possible recommendations and actions.

If the committee members had performed a mock trial of their case, then perhaps they would have seen that their evidence was not strong enough to call for a reduction in size across all English classes. While there is research demonstrating that smaller class sizes make a difference in student learning outcomes in composition courses, there is not similar research for literature or film or theory courses. Yet, because of groupthink – the

reluctance to create conflict amongst group members, the committee decided to make the recommendation to lower all class sizes, regardless of their lack of solid evidence.

*Question 9:* How do we do communicate our findings?

*Case Study Response:* Because the target audience was administrators, the committee decided that the recommendation document would be most effective if written as a straightforward executive summary, limited to a few pages with visual elements like bulleted lists and tables.

*Analysis:* When determining the method for communicating its findings, the English Class Size Committee was thinking about two different delivery methods: an oral and visual presentation to the full faculty and a written presentation for administrators. The documents used for these presentations were static, final, formal. While this form of documentation was necessary, it might have also been helpful to create a working document that could be dynamic, evolving, and informal. This digital document could chart the committee's arguments, link to the committee's research, and provide a roadmap for others who may continue to investigate the same questions in the future. Additionally, with a more specific research problem in mind, visual elements that directly address that problem could be leveraged. For instance, if the committee determined that the most exigent problem was the time it takes for faculty to teach larger courses, the committee could focus on designing visual representations of faculty time to illustrate the problem.

Even without this heuristic question to prompt the committee, members were able to successfully communicate their findings because they considered audience needs from

the beginning of the process. The communication efforts could have been strengthened, however, if the committee had a more finite focus.

*Question 10:* If the findings urge action, what are the next steps?

*Case Study Response:* Not specified.

*Analysis:* Here, too, the English Class Size Committee at KSU might have been more successful if it had a heuristic to follow. By not anticipating the need for a response to this question, the committee's work has languished on the Dean's desk. Although it may not be customary to form action committees or task forces to follow-up on investigative work within academic departments, charging a coalition of vested parties with the purpose of campaigning for change might urge administrative action.

### **Lessons from Applying the Heuristic to the Case Study**

Although the heuristic is just a simple list of questions designed to guide a group through informed, deliberate decision-making, it provides an occasion for committee members to break the flow of work, pose alternate points of view, and question process. The heuristic encourages committee members to reject the notion that committee service is perfunctory and instead engage in meaningful, productive, and creative committee work. Approaching the issue of class size through this heuristic might lead to research and service opportunities that could benefit all stakeholders.



## Chapter 4: Suggestions and Conclusions

### Findings

By applying the heuristic to the case study in the previous chapter, I was able to examine each step of the KSU committee's process and determine a series of findings that could aid committees at other institutions, should they decide to undertake similar work. The ten findings mirror the ten questions of the heuristic and should be considered suggestions for building a successful case for smaller English class sizes:

Finding #1: A committee should have one clear goal.

Finding #2: A committee should have a stated research problem.

Finding #3: A committee should conduct a stakeholder analysis and involve members with diverse perspectives.

Finding #4: Committee members should understand the current institutional climate and historic context to determine the likely boundaries of the project.

Finding #5: Committee members must possess the time and project management skills to identify the kairotic moment and implement the right study at the right time.

Finding #6: A committee must identify all available resources (including time, funding, and personnel) prior to finalizing the research plan.

Finding #7: A committee should consider designing their research in concert with ongoing work in the field.

Finding #8: A committee should actively combat groupthink by organizing an internal debates.

Finding #9: A committee should leverage multiple media and modes of communication to address multiple audiences.

Finding #10: Committee members must consider that follow-up action may be required to enact their recommendations.

These findings are a result of examining the strengths and weaknesses of this particular case study in comparison to an ideal approach. Of course, most committees undertaking this type of work will not be acting under a set of ideal conditions, but perhaps these suggestions will help guide others passed some of the hurdles faced by KSU's English Class Size Committee.

### **Opportunities for Additional Research**

While researching the issues surrounding class size, I encountered several areas outside the scope of this project that call for additional research. First, we need more research pertaining to class size and the English Studies disciplines other than composition. Although the KSU English Class Size Committee chose to include all of the various course types in its investigation and subsequent recommendations, the majority of the existing scholarship is limited to exploring the relationship between class sizes and writing courses. Without more data on literature courses and class sizes, it is difficult for English departments to determine the most advantageous strategies for undertaking class size research at their own institutions.

To bridge this gap in the scholarship, perhaps researchers should attempt to create a study that might be applied across different course types to accurately gauge the effects of class size on students in multiple types of courses. Is it possible for researchers to design a study that they could administer to first-year composition classes as well as literary theory classes or advanced creative writing classes? As the literature review reveals, some scholars have turned to the data collected through course and instructor evaluations to measure and compare the learning outcomes achieved in classes across multiple disciplines. Despite the scholarship that supports using course and instructor evaluations for this purpose, the main argument for interpreting the data from these survey instruments as a measurement of student learning is accessibility, not accuracy. Since course and instructor evaluations are not designed to assess the relationship between class size and student learning outcomes specific to different English Studies courses, appropriating the data for that purpose provides inexact measurements and dismisses any differences among the disciplines. Although course and instructor evaluations are readily available, researchers should consider designing a study that could specifically address the needs of the different disciplines.

Course and instructor evaluations are also used to generalize whether class size affects student learning outcomes, and again, these surveys provide an inexact measurement because they compare class sizes in a range. Whereas a study (like the one conducted by Bedard and Kuhn) might investigate the differences in learning outcomes for students in classes with fewer than twenty students versus classes with twenty-one to fifty students versus classes with fifty-one to eighty students, the actual on-campus conversations about course enrollment caps might concern adjusting class sizes by just

one or two students. Ideally, a researcher would design a study that would more thoroughly determine whether there is a significant difference for student learning outcomes when course enrollments are adjusted only slightly and what the rate of change is per each additional student in a class. Knowing this information would aid faculty in making arguments about class size. As demonstrated earlier, when a lecturer teaches a 5/5 load, adding two students to each class has an exponential effect on her workload. So if research can demonstrate that an additional two students per course affects only faculty workload, not student learning, then the nature of the argument changes.

Another possible area of research involves class sizes for online and hybrid courses. While some scholars are beginning to investigate this topic, the research is inconclusive. For instance, Eric Bettinger at Stanford University has found that increased class sizes online do not negatively impact student learning (“Online, Size Doesn’t Matter” n.p.), yet David Reinheimer’s work suggests that for online composition courses, size does matter. Because an online course does not have the limitation of a physical space, some administrators may be tempted to place a higher enrollment cap on these courses. The faculty survey conducted by the English Class Size Committee did prompt faculty to indicate if their ideal (optimal) and maximum acceptable class sizes for online and hybrid differed from the ideal (optimal) and maximum acceptable class sizes for onsite courses. The data points collected for online and hybrid courses were close but not identical to onsite courses, but the trends were not strong enough to draw any solid conclusions. To begin to understand if and how online and hybrid courses affect faculty workload differently from onsite courses, one might conduct a simple survey polling faculty on which type of course takes more time. If some preliminary conclusions could

be made from that data, then a researcher might implement a study like John Ziker's in which faculty actually track the allocation of their time to determine if their perceptions match their realities.

Apart from the need for the additional empirical research that I've outlined above, my study identified another opportunity for research: investigating the most appropriate and effective methods for engaging administrators and students in conversations that are typically dominated by faculty. My research stresses the importance of involving all stakeholders in a conversation in order to create the most rhetorically-sound argument possible, but this conclusion presupposes that all stakeholders are willing participants in this inclusive conversation. Since administrators and students do not have the same incentive as faculty for sitting on a committee, how can they be induced to participate in the work of investigating class sizes? While a committee may declare that its meetings are open and that all are welcome to join the discussion, it is more difficult to truly involve others than to invite them. With more research, we could determine if faculty, administrators, and students desire deliberate collaboration and, if so, the best methods for facilitating collaboration.

## **Conclusion**

From the literature review to the case study to the creation of the heuristic, the work of my capstone has revolved around making and breaking recommendations. I have rejected the notion that there are one-size-fits-all class size recommendations and focused on creating a customized guide to determining research and recommendations based on the rhetorical situation found at each institution examining class size. The heuristic

reminds faculty, students, and administrators to question their assumptions about the other stakeholder groups and work to find common ground through collaboration. While the tendency, especially in universities acting like corporations, is to try to persuade others by using numbers and figures, the classical act of invention encourages us to employ strategies that go beyond the presentation of scientific proof. By focusing arguments too much on units of measurement – the minutes clocked by faculty each week, the exact number of ideal bodies that can fit into a classroom, the budgetary bottom-line – it is easy to forget that many decisions are made because of relationships.

At universities, bottom-up change happens through consensus, which can only be achieved by including divergent perspectives in decision making. By engaging strategic partners throughout the process of examining enrollment cap policies, class size issues will cease to be viewed as a faculty problem and start to be viewed as an institutional problem. Students and contingent faculty are often the least enfranchised members of the university community, so inviting them to join the conversation along with tenure-track faculty and administrators will reframe the dialogue.

### Works Cited

- “ADE Guidelines for Class Size and Workload for College and University Teachers of English: A Statement of Policy.” *Association of Departments of English*. Modern Language Association, 1992. Web. 27 November 2015.
- American Association of University Professors’s Committee C on College and University Teaching, Research, and Publication. “The Politics of Intervention: External Regulation of Academic Activities and Workloads in Public Higher Education.” *Academe* 82.1 (1996): 46-52. Print.
- Arias, J. J. and Douglas M. Walker. “Additional Evidence on the Relationship between Class Size and Student Performance.” *Journal of Economic Education* 35.4 (2004): 311-329. Print.
- AWP Board of Trustees. “AWP Guidelines for Creative Writing Programs & Teachers of Creative Writing.” *Association of Writers & Writing Professionals*. Association of Writers & Writing Professionals, n.d. Web. 27 November 2015.
- Bedard, Kelly and Peter Kuhn. “Where Class Size Really Matters: Class Size and Student Ratings of Instructor Effectiveness.” *Economics of Education Review* 27.3 (2008): 253-265. Print.
- Carter, Michael J. and Heather Harper. “Student Writing: Strategies to Reverse Ongoing Decline.” *Academic Questions* 26.3 (2013): 285-295. Print.

- CCCC Executive Committee. "Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 40.3 (1989): 329-336.
- . "Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing." *Conference on College Composition and Communication*. National Council of Teachers of English, March 2015. Web. 27 November 2015.
- Centra, John A. "Student Ratings of Instruction and Their Relationship to Student Learning." *American Educational Research Journal* 14.1 (1977): 17-24. Print.
- Chapman, Lauren and Larry Ludlow. "Can Downsizing College Class Sizes Augment Student Outcomes? An Investigation of the Effects of Class Size on Student Learning." *JGE: The Journal of General Education* 59.2 (2010): 105-123. Print.
- Cuseo, Joe. "The Empirical Case Against Large Class Size: Adverse Effects on the Teaching, Learning, and Retention of First-Year Students." *Journal of Faculty Development* 21.1 (2007): 5-21. Print.
- Gilbert, Sid. "Quality Education: Does Class Size Matter?" *CSSHE Professional File* 14 (1995): 1-6. Print.
- Glau, Greg (2006). *Project 85 PowerPoint Overview and Spreadsheet*. [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <http://compfaqs.org/Workload/ReducingClassSize-ASU>
- Haswell, Richard. "Class Sizes for Regular, Basic, and Honors Writing Courses." *CompPile*. CompPile, September 2005. Web. 27 November 2015.
- . "Average Time-on-Course of a Writing Teacher." *CompPile*. CompPile, February 2005. Web. 27 November 2015.



- Horning, Alice. "The Definitive Article on Class Size." *WPA: Writing Program Administration* 31.1-2 (2007): 11-34. Print.
- "Increasing Student Success: Smaller Classes, Innovative Pedagogy at UCF." *Association of American Colleges & Universities*. Association of American Colleges & Universities, June/July 2010. Web. 23 November 2015.
- Jaschik, Scott. "Composition, Overcrowded." *Inside Higher Ed*. Inside Higher Ed, 16 March 2009. Web. 3 May 2015.
- . "Online, Size Doesn't Matter." *Inside Higher Ed*. Inside Higher Ed, 5 January 2015. Web. 3 May 2015.
- Katz, Steven B. "The Ethic of Expediency: Classical Rhetoric, Technology, and the Holocaust." *College English* 54.3 (1992): 255-75. Print.
- Kronstadt, Jill. "The Shelf Life of Total B.S." *Paper Balls*. Paper Balls, 25 March 2012. Web. 23 November 2015.
- Levy, David C. "Do College Professors Work Hard Enough?" *The Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 23 March 2012. Web. 23 November 2015.
- "MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Teaching: Final Report." *Modern Language Association*. Modern Language Association, n.d. Web. 3 May 2015.
- Murray, Donald. "The Essential Delay: When Writer's Block Isn't." *When a Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writer's Block and Other Composing-Process Problems*. Ed. Mike Rose. New York: Guilford Press, 1985. 219-26. Print.
- Ong, Walter J. "The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction." *PMLA* 90.1 (1975): 9-21. Print.

Reinheimer, David A. "Teaching Composition Online: Whose Side is Time On?"

*Computers and Composition* 22 (2005): 459-470. Print.

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. *Resource*

*Manual for the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality*

*Enhancement*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Decatur, GA: Southern Association of College and Schools,

2012. Web. 24 April 2016.

United States Department of Education. *Digest of Education Statistics 2013* (NCES

2015-011). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education

Sciences, 2015. Web. 19 January 2016.

Ziker, John. "The Long, Lonely Job of Homo Academicus." *The Blue Review*. Boise

State University, 31 March 2014. Web. 4 May 2015.