

# Data-Driven Advocacy Guide

A Reference Card for WPAs — Class Size, DFW Contextualization & Data Feminism

## HEURISTIC 01

### Planning Your Advocacy

Before gathering or presenting any data, ask:

- What is the **exigence** — why now, and what is at stake?
- What is your **goal**, and what genre does your audience expect?
- Who is your **audience** — what data is legible and credible to them?
- Where did this data come from? What **biases** should you flag?
- Who can help with **data collection and analysis**?
- What **scholarship and national standards** support your case?
- Are you making a **comparison**? What is the appropriate benchmark?
- What are the **limitations** of your data for interpretation?
- What **language** is legible to your audience? (enrollment, SCH, retention)
- What is your **circulation plan** — who sees this, when, and how?

### KEY PRINCIPLE

Match your data to administrative legibility. 'Student credit hours' speaks differently than 'students per section' — but they measure the same thing. Know which frame your dean uses.

## HEURISTIC 02

### Class Size Case Study

Visualizing class size data for different audiences:

- For campus leaders:** Dashboard — avg class size by dept overlaid with cost and Student Credit Hour (SCH) data. Frame caps as a lever for retention and graduation, not just a labor issue.
- For faculty governance:** Class size distributions by course type and modality, with student learning outcomes alongside cap size. Show the learning rationale.
- For public advocacy:** Before/after comparison of cap size changes correlated with retention rates or student satisfaction. Use the national distribution chart.

**Equity check:** Are low-enrollment sections (independent studies, honors) distorting averages? Disaggregate by section type before computing means.

**Transparency rule:** Every visualization should include its data source, collection date, and known limitations. This is non-negotiable.

**Framing principle:** Position class size as a lever for student success, not as a cost or labor complaint. Cite CCCC's standard as the disciplinary authority — not just your preference.

### CCCC STANDARD

**≤ 20 students per writing section · ≤ 60 students per instructor per term**

Source: CCCC Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing (rev. 2023) · [cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/postsecondarywriting](http://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/postsecondarywriting)

## DATA FEMINISM FRAMEWORK

### Critical Questions for Every Stage of Data Work

Drawing on D'Ignazio & Klein, *Data Feminism* (MIT Press, 2020):

- **Who collected this data?** With what purposes? At whose expense?
- **Whose goals** are foregrounded in this analysis — retention? cost-cutting? student learning?
- **Who benefits** from the current data framing — and who does not?
- **What is not counted?** What working conditions, student needs, or structural factors are invisible in the metric?
- **Who is harmed** by the dominant interpretation of this data?
- **Whose labor** produced this data, and are they credited?

### NATIONAL BENCHMARKS AT A GLANCE

Metric	Value	CCCC Standard
FYC / 101 national median	22	≤ 20
2-year college median cap	25	≤ 20
4-year institution median	22	≤ 20
% meeting ≤20 standard	37%	100%
Most common single cap	25	≤ 20
N institutions in dataset	435+	—

Source: CWPA Community-Sourced Class Size Database, 435+ institutions · via The Writing Program Exchange (2025)

# DFW Contextualization Guide

What to do when administrators ask about high DFW rates in composition courses

<b>01</b>	<b>STEP 01</b> <b>SLOW DOWN &amp; CONTEXTUALIZE</b>	Don't jump to 'fix' a DFW rate without context. Ask: What is the national range for DFW rates in composition, for your institution type? A 22% DFW rate at an open-access community college is not the same problem as 22% at a selective 4-year institution. Framing matters before intervention.
<b>02</b>	<b>STEP 02</b> <b>ASSESS YOUR SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	Before attributing DFW rates to curriculum or instruction: What academic, literacy, writing center, research, and ELL support does your institution offer? Who connects students to it — active outreach, or passive self-referral? Does the institution have the resources to serve the students it admits?
<b>03</b>	<b>STEP 03</b> <b>DISAGGREGATE YOUR DATA</b>	A single DFW rate hides variation. Break it down by: course type (101/102/dev/ALP), modality (F2F/online/hybrid), student demographics (first-gen, Pell, ELL), section cap size ( $\leq 20$ vs. 21-25 vs. 26+), instructor type (FT/TT vs. adjunct), and time/format. See Derek Mueller's 'Silhouette of DFWI' for visualization approaches.
<b>04</b>	<b>STEP 04</b> <b>GATHER FACULTY &amp; STUDENT PERSPECTIVES</b>	Survey faculty at semester end: why did each student receive a DFW grade? What resources were available? Hold focus groups. Survey students who received DFW grades: What were the barriers? What would have helped? Qualitative data humanizes the numbers and often reveals systemic patterns invisible in aggregates.
<b>05</b>	<b>STEP 05</b> <b>CONNECT DFW TO WORKING CONDITIONS</b>	Instructors with 25+ students cannot provide feedback quality that prevents Ws and Fs. Contingent faculty with multiple jobs cannot offer adequate intervention. High adjunct ratios correlate with higher DFW rates. Surface this: How do our faculty working conditions affect our ability to deliver the early intervention that prevents DFW grades?

**DATA FEMINISM REMINDER:** The DFW 'problem' is often framed in ways that locate failure in students or instructors — not in institutional systems, resource allocation, or working conditions. Ask who benefits from this framing, and who does not. Naming the frame is the first step to changing it. (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020)