OFFICE OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES—UNIVERSITY OF UTAH
UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL REPORT TO THE ACADEMIC VICE PRESIDENT/AND THE UNIVERSITY SENATE

July 17, 2006

The Undergraduate Council has completed its study of the University Writing Program.

The External Review Committee was:

Barbara Couture, Dean
College of Liberal Arts
Washington State University

Donald Rubin, Professor
Departments of Speech Communication and Language Education and the Program in Linguistics
University of Georgia

The Internal Review Committee was:

Tom Huckin, Professor of English and Director of the University Writing Program, U of U
Maureen Mathison, Associate Professor of Communication, U of U
Susan Miller, Professor of English, U of U
Raul Sanchez, Assistant Professor of English and Director of the Writing Lab, U O U
Three LEAP Instructors, U of U
Fifteen (or so) University Writing Program Instructors, U of U
Robert Newman, Dean of the College of Humanities, U of U
John Francis, Vice President for Undergraduate Studies, U of U
Ann Darling, Professor of Communication, Chair of the Department of Communication, and Chair of University Writing Program Director Search Committee, U of U
Sharon Aiken-Wisniewski, Associate Dean for University College Advising, U of U
Brooke Hopkins, Professor of English and Founder of the University Writing Program, U of U
Adrian (Buz) Palmer, Professor of Linguistics and Director of the ESL Program, U of U
Chris Anson, Professor of English, Director of the Writing and Speaking Program at North Carolina State University, and President of the Council of Writing Program Administrators

The following summarizes the reports provided by both the Internal and External Review Teams, and the response from the Director of the University Writing Program.

PROGRAM PROFILE AND INTRODUCTION

Program and Governance

Since it was founded in 1983, the University Writing Program has impacted greatly the education of undergraduates at the University of Utah. The program was established to develop and enhance undergraduate writing instruction, training of writing teachers, partner with colleges and
departments for writing-across-the-curriculum efforts, and to provide opportunities for graduate education in writing studies. When the external and internal reviewers first wrote their report two years ago, the most pressing need was for a new Director. An Interim Director had led the program for the previous five years, and multiple searches for a new Director had been unsuccessful. This created a leadership vacuum which was problematic. The new job description read as follows: “Performance expectations of the director should emphasize engaging in a nationally recognized program of research in composition studies, providing intellectual leadership and instruction for the graduate program in Rhetoric and Composition, functioning as a campus and community leader for promoting linkages between UWP and diverse disciplines and constituencies, fostering sense of community and professionalism among UWP instructors and students, and generally enacting a vision of effective and innovative writing instruction at University of Utah. This position has been filled with Maureen Mathison who has been a faculty member of the UWP since 1994.

The UWP manages courses that help students satisfy general education and bachelor’s degree requirements, and functions under the College of Humanities. There is no undergraduate major in writing, but there is a minor in Literacy Studies. The graduate program includes a M.A. rhetoric/composition emphasis that can complement a M.A. in British or American Literature or American Studies, and a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition. Both are interdisciplinary programs offered by the departments of English, Communication, and Education, and Culture and Society in the College of Education.

Faculty and teaching support

The faculty includes four full time tenure track faculty who are engaged in research and administration. Two of the four are well known nationally for their research productivity and impact on their fields. Teaching fellows, adjunct full and part-time instructors teach FY composition courses (the FY composition requirement is a two-semester requirement) and are for the most part accomplished instructors. There was no institutional mechanism for integrating, instructing or communicating with the teaching faculty as a whole. About 20 percent of the classes are taught for LEAP students. LEAP instructors and UWP coordinate their teaching efforts in terms of assignments.

Besides the more traditional requirements for service and scholarship and the mentoring of graduate or undergraduate students, the full time faculty of the UWP are asked to coordinate at least one undergraduate writing course, participate in teacher trainings, participate in the University Writing Center’s supervision and tutor training, and consult widely with members of the Colleges of Business, Engineering, Nursing and Medicine, again in the effort to expand writing throughout the curriculum.

Students

The UWP serves the native English speaking population at the University of Utah. ESL students do not take writing classes but are required to take the ESL sequence. Advanced placement students might not take writing courses through the Program. Transfer students might have already satisfied the writing requirement before they come to the university.

Facilities and Support

The University Writing Program is located in the Languages and Communication Building near both the Department of English and the College of Humanities offices. The new University Writing Center is located conveniently on the third floor of the Marriott Library.

COMMENDATIONS

The Undergraduate Council commends the University Writing Program (UWP) for the following:
1. The UWP has great potential to meet the emphasis on writing across the curriculum.
2. The talent and dedication of the scholars, teachers, and staff members who continually strive to provide quality instruction in writing, rhetoric, and composition. All appear very competent and student oriented.
3. The interim director is respected by graduate students and colleagues.
4. One of the seven recommendations of the 2002 task force, namely the creation of a state of the art writing center (University Writing Center), has been reached.
5. The new Writing Center (WC) is well organized, in an ideal and optimum location, and is staffed by a trained TA group.
6. The commitment and dedication of the part time adjunct faculty.
7. The responsiveness, flexibility, and commitment of the UWP to the units on campus who express a desire to improve the writing in particular curricula. This is exemplified by the collaboration with the School of Business.
8. The creation of writing 3400 sections connected with service learning projects provides students opportunities to apply their writing in real world environments.
9. The instructional integration between LEAP and UWP appears to be highly successful.
10. Writing is viewed to be important on campus.
11. With respect to the graduate writing program:
   a. The two full professors are well known nationally and the two junior professors have begun impressive research agendas.
   b. Graduate students admitted to the program are of high quality.
   c. The graduate coursework is of high quality and universally commended.
   d. The English Department is poised to continue to support the graduate Rhetoric and Composition Program.
   e. The Communication Department is open to more significant involvement.
   f. The original interdisciplinary design of the Ph.D. program has merit and is a distinguishing characteristic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. New Director:
   a. The program requires a proactive search for a new director.
   b. The search committee should be chaired by a chair within the College of Humanities.
   c. The position description should emphasize scholarly production, intellectual leadership, acting as a campus and community leader for promoting linkages between UWP and other constituencies, increasing professionalism between and among instructors and students, and enacting an appropriate vision for the UWP.
d. The director should have a tenure-home in one of the departments that are active in the undergraduate and graduate UWP programs.
e. The director should participate in the department heads' council in the College of Humanities.
f. Budgetary authority and fund-raising expectations should be explicit.
g. The director should convene a retreat to formulate by-laws (selection, roles, and responsibilities of all key positions, mean of decision making, types of appointments, appoint an advisory body) and strategic plan.
h. The director should carefully reflect on the roles of participating departments. How are graduate assistantships dispersed? How is faculty performance evaluated?
2. Administrative Burden
   a. The director should be supported by an associate director who would coordinate and assist in delivering support services.
3. Adjunct Faculty
   a. UWP should hire a number of full time (with full benefits) teaching faculty.
4. Writing Center
   a. A permanent home should be addressed.
   b. Consider expanding TAs role so that they are allowed to respond to spelling, grammar, etc.
   c. TAs should receive training on how to effectively reply ESL students.
   d. The Writing Center should have a research component.
5. Writing Department
   a. The creation of a Department of Writing should be considered.
6. Communication between UWP and area high schools should be considered and encouraged.
7. Student placement into courses should be examined. Self-directed placement should be examined.
8. Greater acceptance and appreciation for all those on campus who value and focus on writing.
   a. The University and UWP should fund developmental grants to encourage more writing in courses.
   b. An interdisciplinary writing board should be formed to oversee upper division courses.
   c. Joint appointments should be considered.
9. Graduate Writing Program
   a. The administrative coordinator/director of the PhD and MA program in Rhetoric and Composition needs to be designated and receive periodic reviews.
   b. The administrative coordinator/director of the PhD and MA program in Rhetoric and Composition should pilot its program and make certain the three programs are clearly delineated.
   c. There should be meetings among the chairs of the involved departments to discuss continued commitment to the PhD program.
   d. At least one full time faculty member is needed.
10. External Coordination and Outreach
    a. The ability to fund service, outreach, and the WC on a SCH-based paradigm is not wise. The WC should be funded separately.
    b. UWP faculty should receive release time for outreach.
    c. Faculty should receive incentives for entrepreneurial and external funding ventures.
    d. Developmental efforts should be initiated to support UWC programs.
    e. UWP should forge links with the College of Education.
11. Staffing
a. Full-time tenure-track and/or tenured faculty should increase to at least six.
b. An academic associate director for undergraduate programs is needed.
c. Full-time office assistance should be increased by at least one.
d. Pay scales for TAs, TFs, and AIs should be evaluated.

12. Greater communication between ESL and UWP is encouraged.

13. Deficit management should be addressed by hiring more tenure track teaching faculty. While pay and benefits would be costly, savings would likely be experienced. TA turnover would decrease and other faculty’s administrative load would decrease.
   a. While SCH has increased UWP’s funding has remained stagnant. This is an issue.
   b. The UWP should consider outreach and entrepreneurial activities to raise funds.

14. The index score for 2010 should increase to 100. The UWP must then account for the extra 500 students that will enter 1010 as a result.

CONCLUSION:

Already, under the strong leadership of Maureen Mathison many of these recommendations have been addressed. The UWP has made efforts to develop an assessment plan, to increase the index score for AP credit, expansion of teaching colloquia, added a fifth full-time faculty member, and has received hard funding for the Writing Center after its successful second year. The UWP has established strong ties with Engineering, Business, and faculty members in the College of Social and Behavioral Science and has begun outreach efforts with the AMES high school, and the University Neighborhood Partnership.

Reviewers uniformly commended the faculty for their dedication and commitment to quality in instruction in writing and in rhetoric and composition studies, a commitment backed by central administration and the administration of the College of Humanities.