**To: UNI Faculty Senate**

**From: University Writing Committee**

**Date: April, 2016**

**Re: Annual Report to the Faculty Senate**

This report will update the Faculty Senate on the status of work completed by the University Writing Committee during the past academic year.

**Charge**

In response to its Faculty Senate charge to review the need for a University Writing Committee, we noted wide faculty support for increased attention to writing instruction at UNI and recommended a positive role for the committee to that end. We were subsequently asked by the Faculty Senate to review best practices in writing instruction as well as graduation requirements and writing instruction at comparable institutions and make a recommendation for UNI. The Faculty Senate received our report and the committee was charged with creating a more specific proposal for changes in graduation requirements on which the Senate could act (Minutes, 10/13/14).

**Actions Taken**

A proposal to enhance writing requirements and instruction was drafted, with the intention to gain input from three key stakeholder groups: the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, the Liberal Arts Core Committee, and the Academic Master Plan Committee (AMPSC). The first two meetings were held on 2/25/15 and 3/13/15, respectively. Both committees agreed that faculty strongly supported the idea of enhanced writing requirements, but work on a fully developed proposal should not begin without the support of the Academic Master Plan Steering Committee and UNI administration.

**Outcome**

The AMPSC chairs Cobb and Chatham-Carpenter requested that we delay our meeting with that committee until Fall, after the arrival of Provost Wohlpart (Cobb email, 4/6/16), and we notified the Faculty Senate to that effect with an email to Tim Kidd on April 10, 2015.

In September, our request for a meeting with the AMPSC was rebuffed with a request that we instead participate in whatever “community feedback and assistance”  process might be developed (Wohlpart email, 9/16/16). As individual faculty members, we have actively participated in all announced strategic planning meetings, surveys, and proposal processes, but we have not yet been invited to contribute as a University committee.

In view of our inability to meet with the AMPSC or the Provost to continue the discussion, we have not yet been able to respond to the Faculty Senate request for a viable, faculty-supported proposal for enhanced writing requirements and instruction.

**Updated Situation**

Several events over the past year seem to support this committee’s conclusion and 2014 recommendation for enhanced writing requirements and instruction at UNI:

1. A Higher Learning Commission Quality Improvement Proposal for an update of the Liberal Arts Core, which explicitly calls for a Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines, is one of three plans under consideration for the University’s 2020 accreditation.
2. The Academic Master Plan survey found 79% of the faculty agreed or strongly agreed that writing intensive courses should be “a distinctive part of UNI’s mission,” ranked them #2 of all curriculum elements (after undergraduate research/creative activity).

While these demonstrate continued faculty support for higher writing expectations, other developments suggest UNI is losing ground with respect to best practices at comparable universities.

1. NSSE Writing module data (Spring 2015) shows UNI students report fewer developmental writing experiences than the mean of our peer institutions at both the first year and senior levels.
2. Academic issues represent only one of the three QIP proposals, with the others focusing on diversity and inclusivity or civility. We might conclude that faculty attention is no longer as focused on writing instruction to the degree it was just a few years ago. However, analysis of NSSE writing module outcomes (Anderson, et al. 2015) correlate writing with both diversity and engagement outcomes, suggesting that writing instruction ought to be included in any one of the proposals.
3. A National Census of Writing found that 83% of surveyed 4-year institutions (n = 671) have an official writing program or department. For universities in our Carnegie classification, the rate jumps to 93%. UNI has no such program. Only 3% of responding institutions require no writing courses beyond the first year, while 30% require one, and 38% require two. UNI requires only a first-year course.
4. Writing programs at peer institutions are universally directed by academically trained faculty members who are supported with 1 or more course releases and/or staff assistance. Although UNI has no official program, we do have two courses that serve the vast majority of our students, College Writing and Research and Integrated Communication (Cornerstone). In both cases, UNI has reduced faculty support within the past two years. The Department of Languages and Literatures no longer provides release time for a tenure track faculty to supervise and develop adjunct and graduate student instructors teaching the basic course. Cornerstone, originally staffed entirely by full-time faculty, is now taught  primarily by adjuncts and instructors. It was originally directed by tenured faculty from Communication Studies and English who had requisite backgrounds in theory, pedagogy, and best practices. Cornerstone is now supervised by adjunct and term instructors.

**Recommendations**

Based on the above, this committee recommends that the Faculty Senate

1. Clarify the committee’s charge with respect to developing a full proposal for enhanced writing requirements and instruction. While the faculty supports our recommendation, it also concurs with our own belief that we should not put effort toward a fully developed plan without administration’s commitment to providing the necessary instructional, assessment, and faculty development resources.
2. Provide guidance with respect to the University Writing Committee’s continuing role as a committee of the Faculty Senate. We comprise a cross section of campus writing expertise, including representatives from the academic colleges, the library, and the academic writing center, but our current role seems out of sync with current academic planning processes.
3. Take steps to ensure that UNI’s current levels of writing instruction are not further compromised by the removal of faculty expertise for writing instruction and assessment currently required in the liberal arts core. In particular, we recommend professionally qualified faculty oversight of university-required writing instruction.

**Work Cited**

Anderson, Paul, Chris Anson, Robert Gonyea, and Charles Paine. “The Contributions of Writing to Learning and Development: Results from a Large-Scale Multi-institutional Study.” *Research in the Teaching of English* 50.2 (Nov. 2015), 199-235.