

*Proposal and Agenda for Reinstatement of University Writing Committee
January 14, 2010
Proposed by
Department of English Language and Literature Writing Committee*

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Rationale

The Foundations of Excellence (FoE) self-study shed considerable light on the way writing is taught at UNI, particularly the lack of systematic, campus-wide philosophy, curriculum, delivery, or common assumptions regarding writing. Because of this, the FoE self-study recommends the reinstatement of a campus-wide University Writing Committee (Learning Dimension Recommended Action Item 2.a.). In addition, while UNI's latest NSSE survey results appear to indicate that a great deal of writing is assigned to students, there is little variety assigned and minimal feedback given to students. It appears, then, that little opportunity exists for students to experience and learn through a range of writing tasks. Furthermore, the LAC Committee has heard from Dr. Jeff Copeland, Head of the Department of English Language and Literature, on the economic and educational benefits of writing instruction within the LAC and supports the department's proposal to re-instate a University Writing Committee as a means to link LAC goals with the wider curriculum as stated in the university catalogue.

Given this, we propose to formally restart the now dormant University Writing Committee. This committee would serve as an advocate of writing as a learning tool. It would not be a task force that seeks to prescribe standards for all, but a facilitating body that helps faculty, programs, and staff understand research on writing instruction as well as apply that research to their own teaching and curricula. While this committee would initially work closely with the LAC to focus on first-year writing, it is implied by the self-study that a strong first-year effort must align with subsequent instruction and coordinated attention to discipline-specific writing within students' chosen programs of study. Thus, initial work may focus on LAC writing courses, but the long-term goal will be to coordinate LAC writing instruction with writing instruction in courses across the curriculum, within both the LAC and major and minor programs.

Reinstating the University Writing Committee can be both an educational benefit for students and an economic one for the university. This reinstatement addresses concerns about persistence and retention, accreditation, and our strategic plan to be recognized as leading undergraduate institution. Indeed, because of the roles writing technology plays in a global world, attention to written communication skills holds promise to distinguish UNI and its programs in cost-effective and pedagogically sound ways.

Scope and Function

A University Writing Committee (UWC) would be an advisory body that promotes conversation and dialogue about the language, goals, and outcomes for writing instruction at UNI. The committee as a whole would pursue goals such as the following:

- consult with the LAC committee to enrich definitions of “writing-enhanced” or “writing-intensive” the liberal arts core and within specific programs across the disciplines
- support departments' efforts to integrate appropriate writing tasks within curricula and SOAs
- promote faculty development initiatives in the theory and pedagogy of writing, rhetoric, and composition
- consult with various offices (e.g., Office of Assessment, Alumni Association, Career Services, etc.) to gather data on, promote an understanding of, and share results about student writing at UNI
- coordinate with the Advising Office to better place students according to their needs
- develop and promote a web presence regarding writing at UNI
- cooperate with programs, departments, and staff to address the unique writing backgrounds and needs of minority and special populations
- promote dialogue about the high school to college transition as it relates to writing instruction and expectations
- assist academic units, where helpful, in developing curricular proposals to be reviewed within the established curriculum process
- report yearly to the Faculty Senate on actions and progress

Members

The most recent membership of the University Writing Committee should remain unchanged. This membership is listed as

- one faculty representative from each of the five undergraduate colleges
 - Social and Behavioral Sciences
 - Humanities and Fine Arts
 - Education
 - Business Administration
 - Natural Sciences
- one representative from the Provost's Office
- one representative from the Academic Achievement Writing Center (now the Academic Learning Center – Writing Center)
- one student representative from UNISA (now NISG)
- one representative from Rod Library
- English Department's Coordinator of Writing Programs, who initially convenes the committee

Because of the likely merger of CHFA and CNS, an initial committee can convene with representatives from both CHFA and CNS. However, it will be up to the committee, in consultation with the Faculty Senate, to propose membership changes after June 30, 2011.

At the discretion of the committee, additional members may be invited from

- The Center for Multicultural Education
- Department of Residence
- Dean of Students

At the discretion of the Provost's Office, the representative from the Writing Center may fulfill representation for the Office as a whole.