

In response to a request from Faculty Senate Vice Chair Jim Mattingly, the University Writing Committee is providing recommendations regarding its charge, current activities, goals, and future direction.

Briefly, the University Writing Committee is an advisory group providing expertise in the area of writing pedagogy, theory, and assessment to the Faculty Senate, designed to provide the Senate with guidance in its governance of the UNI curriculum.

Charge

The proposal for the University Writing Committee included the following charge:

- 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

Update on the Committee’s Work

Since 2010, when the Committee was reconstituted and charged, the work of the committee has included

- Conducted a study of UNI writing curriculum history and outcome data (NSSE, MAPP) available at that time (2010 required).
- Developed a Drupal-based web-presence, writing.uni.edu, now defunct (2011).

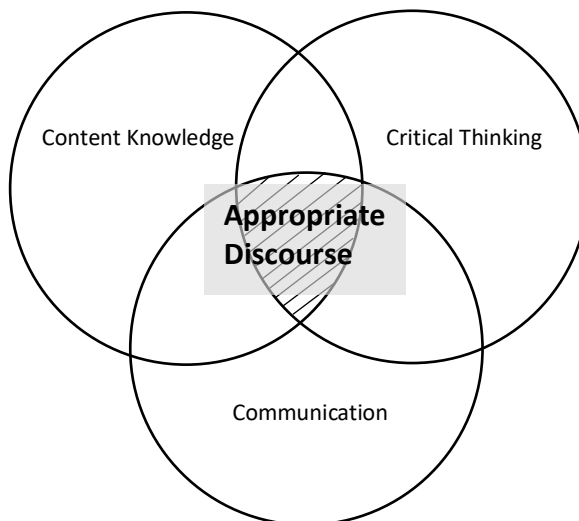
- Created and distributed a follow-up survey of faculty views with respect to NSSE goals and outcomes (2012).
- Reviewed data generated by the English 1005 assessment (2013).
- Conducted a benchmarking study of best practices in writing instruction in peer institutions (2014).
 - Developed a curriculum recommendation to bring UNI writing requirements up to average (6 credits) or best practice (9 credits) among peer institutions.
- With Senate affirmation, held meetings with the UCCC, LAC Committee, and Academic Master Plan Committee to determine faculty support for increased writing requirements for a UNI undergraduate degree (2015-2016).
- Began to coordinate with emerging efforts to update the UNI Strategic Plan; newly developed university goals of Communication, Critical Thinking, and Content Knowledge; and the Provost’s capacity for supporting new curriculum development (2017).
- Initiated efforts to coordinate committee activities with revision of the General Education requirements (2018).

A high-level summary of the Committee’s conclusions includes needs for a) consistent faculty support for additional curricular attention to communication, including written, oral, and mediated discourse, b) a consensus that meaningful enhancements will require additional attention and resources, and c) the conclusion that as an advisory committee of the Faculty Senate, we have neither the resources nor the administrative standing to make a meaningful contribution to the curriculum.

Rationale & Goals

As a cross-disciplinary group of faculty and staff engaged in the research and pedagogy of discourse, committee goals necessarily reflect a common understanding of communication education as a community/culture/organization’s primary mechanism for maintaining norms of appropriate discourse, coordinating work, and accomplishing tasks. A simple diagram illustrates the central notion of a community’s “discourse” as the overlapping spaces created by its norms related to relevant content, effective thinking, and appropriate communication methods.

Fig. 1



We thus understand that “writing” is not a discrete skill, but simply a short-hand term for students’ most obvious demonstration of their integrated mastery of academically desirable content knowledge, critical thinking, and communication methods (see Fig. 1). It is “writing” in the sense that it is technologically mediated, thus available as an object for assessment and ongoing learning enhancement.

A curriculum that integrates development across these interrelated aspects of discourse serves student needs most effectively (e.g., Kuh et al 2010; Eddy, Barefoot & Kinzie 2014; NASEM 2017). Further, curricular and classroom inquiry supports faculty in developing and implementing such best practices (Welsh & Metcalfe 2003; Covington, Petherbridge & Warren 2005). This is especially important as writing proliferates both inside and outside the academy and our curricula shape “the creation of a writing public that, in development and in linkage to technology, parallels the development of a reading public in the 19th century” (Yancey 2004).

We are gratified that UNI has adopted overall learning goals that support the development of students’ capacity for participation in the discursive communities we serve, but we are concerned that our curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment will separate communication skills, critical thinking skills, and content knowledge into discrete silos that cannot support our fundamental educational mission.

Recommendations for the Future

The University Writing Committee recommends two fundamental changes that would allow us to more effectively contribute our expertise to UNI’s educational mission. We confirm our original charge to enhance the curriculum in the area of discourse, but that goal is not best served from our current role as a Faculty Senate Committee.

1. We recommend redefining our mission and structure from advisory committee of the Faculty Senate, which has neither oversight over curriculum development or assessment nor resources to implement its curricular decisions. Instead, our services would be better utilized within the purview of the Provost’s Office, which is responsible for supporting and assessing the curriculum approved by the Faculty Senate. In short, we argue that resources and opportunities are being wasted if the committee is limited to demonstrating and articulating institutional needs in an advisory capacity. We can be far more useful by taking a role in implementing the well-established goals of the faculty and helping specialists across the university form a sound, research-supported curriculum that identifies and integrates discipline-appropriate written communication planning, practices, and instruction.

We take no position on the desirability of any specific institutional role. However, we recognize that the Office of Undergraduate Studies encompasses a broad range of functions that must be integrated in order to effectively develop students’ academic, civil, and professional discourse. We also note the extensive support given to faculty through the Center for Teaching and Learning. The committee’s role has

been and continues to be an advocate for both the ubiquity of written discourse as a curricular enrichment and for its specific uses, purposes, and functions across curricular and co-curricular discourse communities. Given our cross-disciplinary mission and expertise, we envision some role that serves to integrate best practices about writing's connection to learning while retaining disciplinary specificity as the most effective way to serve UNI.

2. We recommend support for the development of effective pedagogy, including support for this Committee. The original membership of the University Writing Committee comprised faculty and staff across the University whose assignments included attention to writing instruction. The release times allocated to the Writing Coordinator in Languages & Literatures and the Business Communication Program Coordinator in CBS, for example, allowed those individuals to devote significant time to the activities of the Writing Committee as a legitimate part of their duties. Tenure also insulated this work from administrative pressure, permitting faculty a role in curricular oversight. Co-curricularly, the Academic Writing Center was structured to provide support for discourse across the curriculum, and that Director could bring both professional expertise and University resources to the table. By intentionally appointing faculty who represented each College's writing efforts, the University Writing Committee became the only interdisciplinary network for sharing expertise and resources toward a University-wide goal in Communication.

University resources have since been reallocated, with no commensurate attention to the work of this Committee. We have regularly reported to the Faculty Senate that resources are needed to support the work we have been charged with doing. We feel strongly that leadership for this committee should follow institutional standards among UNI's current and past peers, similar Carnegie classified institutions, and in U.S. higher education generally (see Appendix A).

These changes would capitalize on recent signs of momentum consistent with our proposals. In Spring 2018, the Provost sent two committee members to a Writing Enriched Curriculum Institute at the University of Minnesota. We further note that with Senate approval, the Provost's office is considering better support of cross-disciplinary instruction more generally. We welcome such ongoing support for theorizing, researching, and implementing the high-quality education students expect from UNI.

References

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Appendix A

Section 1: Writing Programs and Their Faculty Administrators (WPAs) at Regional Comprehensives: An Overview of the Data

Notes from Census of Writing: <http://writingcensus.swarthmore.edu/>

Definition

“the term WPA is meant as a general term for anyone who administers any part of a writing program.”

671 four-year institutions responded to survey.

Programs

86% of 4-year institutions surveyed answered that they have an official writing program or department.

- Filtered to Master’s level Carnegie classification and between 10K and 19,999K students, it becomes 93%.

58% of responding institutions reported that FYC was not part of another writing program or a writing department.

- Filtered (as above) this remains fairly stable with 57%
- 71% of institutions reported that FYC’s institutional home was the English department (79% when filtered as above).

Institutional Structures

Only 3% of institutions responded with 0 writing courses beyond the first year (30% = 1; 38% = 2).

62% of institutions responded that they offer writing intensive courses in a department other than English or Writing.

81% said there were explicit goals for these courses.

87% responded that the curriculum committee certifies that a course meets a WI designation. 43% responded writing committee.

73% said they offered faculty development for teaching WI courses.

Section 2: WPAs at UNI’s Peer Institutions 2018

College of Charleston x

Dr. Chris Warnick, Associate Professor and First-Year Writing Coordinator (plus WAC)

Dr. Bonnie Devet, Professor and Writing Lab Director

Eastern Illinois University

Dr. Fern Kory, Professor and WAC, Writing Fellows, and Writing Center Director

Dr. Jad Smith, Professor and Assistant Director of the Writing Center

Ferris State

Dr. David Marquard, Associate Professor and Writing Center Coordinator
WIC Committee works with Liaisons by content areas

James Madison University x

Dr. Jared Featherstone, Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Writing Center
Dr. Kurt Schick, Professor and Director of First-Year Writing
Dr. Laura Schubert, Assistant Professor and Director of JMU Learning Centers
Dr. Paul Mabrey, Assistant Professor and Communication Center Coordinator

Marshall University x

Dr. Kateryna Schray, Professor and WAC Program Director
Maggie Smith, WAC Graduate Assistant
WAC Committee, includes Dr. Anna Rollins, Director of Writing Center/ Prof English

Southern Illinois University – Edwardsville

Dr. Erin Behnen, Assistant Provost for Academic Innovation and Effectiveness
Dr. Matthew Johnson, Associate Professor and Director of First-Year Writing
Stephyn Phillips, Coordinator of Writing Center

Truman State University

David Leaton, Director of Writing Center
Writing Fellows Program

UMass – Dartmouth

Dr. Alexis Teagarden, Assistant Professor and Writing Program Administrator
Dr. Elisabeth Buck, Assistant Professor and Director of Multiliteracy & Communication Center
Amy Parelman, Director Writing and Reading Center
Diana Grady, University Director, Buzzards Bay Writing Project

University of Minnesota – Duluth

Dr. Elizabethada Wright, Professor and Writing Program Administrator
Avesa Rockwell, Associate Writing Program Administrator
Dr. Jill Jenson, Director of Academic Writing & Learning Center

Western Washington University (4 team members attended WEC, math, poli sci, library)

Dr. Shevell Thibou, Director of Teaching and Learning Academy
Dr. Jeremy Cushman, Assistant Professor and Director of Composition