

April 24, 2004

Dear Brenda,

Thanks so much for having me at Davis—I enjoyed myself, and I am very impressed with the progress that has been made since my last visit just over a year ago. You are to be commended for the work you have done.

Let me make a few over-all observations before I answer your specific questions. I do agree with the Dean about the issue of the Writing Board; it should not be a governance board, gathering data or evaluating the director—but rather advisory, or in an oversight capacity. That function was quite clear to me when you explained the need for the board, but the Feb. 19 document suggests otherwise.

Second, I was very impressed with the energy and commitment of the lecturers I talked with over lunch. I was surprised to see, though, that nearly all the post docs and the faculty fellows did not come to the talk. Do they serve on committees or otherwise take part in the life of the program? If not, these two programs need to be re-thought in terms of what they require of the people in them. If one of the desired outcomes is that the programs prepare grad students for the job market, then the post docs/faculty fellows should be on committees and taking an active part in the program, so that they can talk to any hiring committee about their departmental citizenship as well as their research and teaching. Most places that hire our graduates, and probably yours as well, want folks who will pitch in and help do the work of the department. I may have mentioned to you that at WSU I helped to institute a sort of post-doc for our new PhDs that included no released time (since most of the available jobs have comparable teaching loads to that of an instructor/lecturer in a research institution), but did include teaching a variety of courses and committee work. I may have also mentioned that we had an 80% placement rate of the people in this program into tenure-track positions. Having such a large group of faculty in the Writing Program who do not participate in the life of the unit could create problems down the line, since there will be workload inequities with the other lecturers.

Let me answer your questions as best I can, with the caveat that each writing program is site-specific. So I offer these answers as just one way to do things. Your new director will no doubt have enough experience to figure out how to do things there.

1. My director's position is .50, with a .50 teaching load; since the regular load for HFA faculty here is 5 courses, I teach 3 courses one year, two the next. It is a truism of writing program administration that any director needs to be teaching in the program.
2. Every Unit 18 lecturer has one course equivalency for committee work. (Our load here is 9 on paper, so the actual teaching load is 8). That means that much of the work of the unit is done by the lecturers. They head the curriculum sub-committees that shape and maintain the curriculum. Every single lecturer is on

one committee or another; one of the requirements here for being considered for the post-six review is taking a leadership role in program service. You can see our list of committees on our Web site.

There are various additional course releases for certain administrative jobs:

- One person gets an additional course release for running the testing (Subject A on-campus readings and the Writing 1 Common Final).
 - One person gets an additional course release for undergraduate advising with regard to petitions and transfer students (working with the office of the Undergraduate Dean).
 - Six people get an additional course release for supervision of TAs (each of these has 6-7 TAs per AY to supervise).
3. Personnel work is done by two committees, the Lecturer Search Committee (I chair this and the other three are Continuing Faculty), and the Personnel Review Committee, which is a subset of the Executive Committee. The latter committee acts just like a personnel review committee in any department: the folks at the end of their contracts put together a notebook (see our personnel procedures document), one member of the Personnel Committee takes the lead for each person being reviewed and writes up the review, presenting an oral version to the Executive Committee at a marathon meeting in the Spring (we begin at 9 and usually end at 4—I have lunch catered to keep us going). I then meet with all the folks being reviewed to go over the review with them, and give them an abbreviated version so that they can respond to it if they like, but also so they know what they need to do for the next review. Since we have a LOT of pre-six folks, it's quite a bit of work, but it's a fair process and ensures quality control. The merit reviews are done the same way for the continuing faculty.
 4. We have a total of 5 FTE staff: an MSO, an undergraduate advisor, a graduate advisor (because we hire TAs from several departments), two half-time positions that we are in the process of converting to one full-time position that will be the fiscal person, and one person who is our technical advisor/computer person. She maintains our Web site in conjunction with a faculty member who is the Webmeister. We are reorganizing the office so that the undergraduate advisor rather than the graduate advisor will do the scheduling. This latter is a process that involves myself, the MSO, and the scheduler for a couple of initial organizational meetings where we look over the preference sheets sent to us by each lecturer, look at our curriculum plan for the next year, and make some decisions about crucial courses that are hard to staff (some of our specialized upper-division classes). Then the scheduler just plugs everyone else in. If I understand it correctly, you have a lecturer who does the scheduling. I must say that from my point of view this is not a good use of a lecturer's time; it can be handled pretty easily by a good staff person.
 5. I meet with whatever curriculum sub-committees or other committees invite me to their meetings (some committees meet more often than others, but on the whole

each committee meets at least once a quarter); often I'm not needed but sometimes I am. The lecturer search committee meets intensively in Winter and takes a lot of my time, but I feel that I need to be involved in this very important process, since the committee needs help recognizing who might be a good lecturer (e.g., whose letters of rec mean something and whose do not, which programs are better than others). The personnel stuff also takes a lot of my time and that of the Executive Committee, but again, that's important work. We want a high-quality faculty we can be proud of. As a unit, we meet at least once a quarter, more if we have important business to deal with (like the by-laws).

We also have a half-day retreat at the beginning of the school year, something I instituted for team-building (since there was still a lot of angst in some quarters about various issues). For the first retreat, we had lunch (catered in the Faculty Club, which most lecturers hadn't been to since they didn't realize they could go), and then we discussed what our mission statement should be. We spent the next year writing one (it's on our Web site if you'd like to check it). The next year we revisited all our curricular guidelines and refined and updated them. Last year we added outcomes to them, based on the Outcomes Statement from the Council of Writing Program Administrators (available on the Web, if you'd like to check it).

I hope this answers some of your questions. When I came in as director, there was a climate that needed to be changed, so for the first three years I've been involved in more meetings than I might have chosen otherwise. But now we have a new assistant prof. in place, and eight wonderful new pre-six faculty (hired over the past three years) to replace some very marginal folks whose contracts we did not renew as a result of their performance reviews. The program is not yet on automatic pilot, but I'm hopeful that I can pull back a bit soon. Your new director will have at least one colleague right away to help set the tone for your new unit—I would have been very grateful for such help myself at the beginning.

Let me know if I can provide any other information that might be helpful to you. I am excited about the possibility of having five new colleagues at Davis, and will do all I can to help you get the best people for those positions.

Warmly,

Sue

Susan H. McLeod