

December 10, 2003

Joe Kiskis, Chair
Undergraduate Council
Davis Division of the Academic Senate

Subject: Writing at UC Davis

Dear Professor Kiskis,

The Executive Committee of the College of Letters and Science discussed the report of the Undergraduate Council on "Writing at UC Davis," at a meeting on December 1, 2003, and I am writing to relay the results of that discussion.

First, the Executive Committee strongly supports excellent education and effective improvements to education in writing at UCD. Regretfully, our discussion did not consider all aspects of the report, but rather jumped to the most substantive recommendation of the report: to establish a "University Writing Center." There was unanimous displeasure with the proposed center and its proposed activities for two reasons:

1. Valuable resources would be wasted by administering this center outside of a college and department. If such resources are available, the Executive Committee believes they would be best applied to staff writing courses in the disciplines adequately by providing additional Teaching Assistantships specifically to support writing within courses. Many instructors include substantive writing assignments in all sorts of courses, and staffing adequately to provide feedback to students on their writing *in those courses* by TA's that are familiar with the subject matter as well as with writing is the most difficult problem they face when attempting to provide writing instruction within their courses. We do not want resources diverted that could support efforts to teach writing within courses.
2. The report states that, "...the Center would offer all the upper division composition courses" and "...play a role in supervising lower division courses." Responsibility for instruction lies in the Faculties, and it is not clear who would teach the courses if not faculty members and instructors hired through normal procedures as members of the Faculty of a School or College. If there is to be a Writing Center, and if it is to "offer...composition courses," it would make most sense for the program to form within the College of Letters and Science, in the Division of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies, given the present allocation of resources to instruction.

This negative response of the Executive Committee is at least partly a consequence of the lack of communication between the Undergraduate Council and the

College. This is a general problem that should be addressed so we do not duplicate effort and so that traditional disciplinary responsibilities are given respect, even if ultimately they may change. If the report had been carried out in cooperation with the English department and the Dean of Humanities, Arts, and Cultural Studies, the recommendations might have been better received. Although the Undergraduate Council was operating within its charge, the report deals with matters that have a long-established tradition within the College of Letters and Science, and it was probably short-sighted to ignore the tradition and by-pass the relevant department (except for consultation with Professor Zender, apparently early in the Committee's work on writing). Given the response of the Executive Committee to the report, I recommend carefully coordinating further work by the Undergraduate Council in this regard with the English department and with Dean Langland. Perhaps there can be a meeting of minds on this matter rather than a conflict if all agree on the objective.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter S. Rodman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Peter S. Rodman, Chair
Executive Committee
College of Letters & Science

cc: E. Langland, Dean, Division of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies
D. Trask, Assistant Dean, Undergraduate Education and Advising