

May 12, 2004

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

Subject: Proposal for a University Writing Program

Dear Joe,

Thank you for joining the Executive Committee in discussing the proposed University Writing Program (UWP) on Monday, May 3, 2004. I am writing to convey the results of our discussion.

The Executive Committee enthusiastically endorses the concept of a strong UWP that is housed within the Division of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies. There is not unanimous agreement that the UWP should be separated from the Department of English, although the majority of the committee members appear to favor this change as proposed. Our first concern is about the proposed governance of the program, its relationship to the Division of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies, its faculty governance, and the relationship of the proposed Board to the Director of the program. Our second concern is about appointments of faculty hired for the UWP. Our third concern is about the budget, its relationship to the overall budget of the Division of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies, and the role of the Provost, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, and the Dean of the Division of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies in administering the budget of the program.

Governance:

The Executive Committee could only endorse a UWP that is in the charge of a Program Committee appointed according to the practice of the College of Letters and Science. Thus the Dean of the Division of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies would submit the names of a proposed Program Committee, consisting of regular members of the Academic Senate only, to the Executive Committee of the College of Letters and Science annually for approval. The Chair of the Program Committee would be the Director of the UWP, and we would expect the committee to include members from all the undergraduate colleges as is often the case in interdepartmental programs. Consequently the Program Committee would represent the campus as a whole, not simply one division or college.

The Executive Committee believes the plan proposed assigns undue governing power to the new University Writing Board (UWB). It is not legitimate under the By-Laws and Regulations of the Academic Senate for a committee comprising students and Federation members in addition to regular faculty members to run an academic program in the University of California. The curriculum is the responsibility of the Faculties of the Academic Senate only.

We cannot endorse the proposal that a UWB assess the effectiveness of the UWP Director annually as proposed, and we doubt that a Director would be willing to serve with such annual assessment by such a board (as proposed, the UWB includes the Director, and according to the proposal, the UWB assesses the director's effectiveness, which would be an unfortunate relationship).

We would endorse a University Writing Program Advisory Council (UWPAC) that reports to the UWP Director, the Dean of HArCS, the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, and the Provost. We agree that this Advisory Council could play an important role by advocating for improved writing instruction across the campus as you described it to us. The Director as well as the UWP would benefit from such support. The Advisory Council could serve valuably by assessing the state of the program and its effectiveness (assessment of outcomes), reporting with recommendations to the Director and others, but could not have any power of governance. Reporting from the UWPAC must not circumvent the Director.

Faculty appointments.

We support entirely the proposal that a Director and four additional FTE be recruited for this program and that these new faculty members will be specialists in practice and pedagogy of writing composition. We understand, however, that Vice Provost for Academic Personnel Horowitz will not allow FTE to be committed to programs without majors (although other UC campuses do make such appointments). Consequently, all UWP faculty members will be appointed in departments such as English or Communication, where their research on writing composition and on teaching and learning writing composition may not be highly valued. The new appointees are expected to carry out research focused on the goals of the program, and they must be rewarded for this work alone. It is distressing, then, that they might become “second class citizens” in departments that value other sorts of research. A major merit of the new program is that regular faculty members will both teach and study writing composition, and even joint appointments could stifle development of a strong new area of research and scholarship on writing.

The UWP is a different and very special enterprise from existing programs because it aims to improve the writing of undergraduates across the campus and to do so with the effort of regular Senate faculty in addition to the excellent cadre of professional Lecturers now providing this instruction. The special importance of the program has been confirmed by the Provost’s endorsement and commitment of new FTE. We believe you and the Undergraduate Council must argue to the Provost and the Vice Provost for Academic Personnel that FTE for the UWP should be provided in the Program itself. This could be a special exception based on the aim to foster excellence in a new area of research and scholarship by full time Senate faculty. If the Vice Provost for Academic Personnel and Provost will not allow this, our administration is not prepared to support the program fully, and the new UWP may not flourish any better than past incarnations.

Budget:

This is a complex issue, and the proposal does not yet make the structure of budgeting clear. This Executive Committee believes that the budget must be administered by the Dean of HArCS, but that there is a tension between the campus role of the UWP and budgeting through a division. One solution has been to fund directly from the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, which appears to have been wasteful in the past. The Dean oversees costs of teaching across a spectrum of departments and programs and aims to keep costs for teaching and value per dollar high and constant across this set. Special programs under the Vice Provost do not benefit from the discipline of this perspective because the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies deals only indirectly with courses taught per FTE. The Director will need the strength and perspective of a Dean to handle pressures from teaching staff to reduce teaching loads in return for other tasks in the program (advising, testing, running workshops, etc.). Without a strong Director working with a Dean, the value per dollar expended on teaching can erode, and the solution is to place the UWP budget in the hands of the Dean. It would be

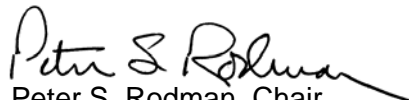
awkward to involve the Director of the UWP in negotiations of the annual budget with the Provost, the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies and the Dean because this Director would have a special relationship to the budget unlike other Directors and Chairs.

At the same time, the program will serve all colleges, and writing bears a special relationship to all learning. Consequently, the campus needs a commitment from the Dean to maintain the writing program in the face of vagaries of the budget as best possible, perhaps insulating the UWP somewhat from effects of variation in funding to the Division. Possibly the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies may assist the Dean in maintaining this commitment when necessary.

Overall, again, the Executive Committee endorses the concept of the UWP and placing the UWP and its Director under the supervision of the Dean of HARCS. Governance should be according to normal governance of an academic program, by a committee of Senate faculty members. The problem of placing new scholars who study composition and its pedagogy must be addressed so that the new faculty members are first class citizens of an independent program, not second class citizens in other departments. Finally, the budget for the UWP should be administered by the Dean of HARCS as for all programs in a Division, and the UWP Director should not participate in annual budget negotiations any more than other Chairs and Directors. Some insulation of UWP from vagaries of funding should be made possible.

The following point is my own, although some other Executive Committee members may share my view. Better writing is a critical need for our undergraduates, and the lack of adequate writing among undergraduates is bordering on a crisis. The critical value of writing skills transcends disciplinary boundaries because without writing skills, other learning has little meaning. Without clear writing, what is learned cannot be communicated. Attention to the new UWP should therefore transcend normal maintenance of a department or program. Striking a balance between this special treatment and the need for the Dean's wisdom and oversight to maintain proper value for resources expended on the UWP is a challenge that should be addressed thoroughly.

Sincerely,


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