

Schedule: University of Florida University Writing Program

External Review Committee

Dr. Deborah Holdstein, Northern Illinois University

Dr. Charles Schuster, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

Wednesday, September 13, 2006

Dinner w/Jack Sabin, Creed Greer

Thursday, September 14, 2006

(215 Dauer open to committee all day)

9:00 – 10:00am	Dauer 215	UWP Advisory Committee
10:15-12:45pm	Dauer 215	Graduate Students, including lunch
1:00-2:00pm	2014 Turl Hall	Neil Sullivan, Dean, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
2:15 – 2:45pm	235A Tigert	Joe Glover, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs
3:00-4:00pm	239 Tigert	Janie Fouke, Provost
4:15-4:45	215 Dauer Hall	Mel New, Professor of English
5:00-5:30	215 Dauer Hall	Pat Craddock, Professor of English

Working dinner (Holdstein/Schuster)

Friday, September 15, 2006

9:00-9:30am Dauer 215 Cammy Abernathy, Associate Dean & Alumni
Professor of Materials Science & Engineering

9:30-10:30am Dauer 215 Kenneth Sassaman, Anthropology

10:00-10:30am Dauer 215 Albert Matheny, Associate Dean for Academic
Advising, Liberal Arts & Sciences

10:30-11:15am Dauer 215 University Writing Program Faculty/Course
Coordinators: Heather Milton, John Ronan

11:30-12:00pm Dauer 215 Angela Lindner, Associate Professor of
Environmental Engineering

Lunch with UWP Mentors

1:15-2:15pm Dauer 215 Graduate Students

2:15-3:15pm Dauer 215 English Department Faculty Members
John Leavey, Pamela Gilbert, Kenneth Kidd, Judy Page, Sid Dobrin, Phil
Wegner, Kim Emery, Ed White, Raul Sanchez, and Jack Perlette

Dauer 215 open for our use until 3:30pm

3:30-4:00pm Yon 427 David Colburn, Provost Emeritus & Professor of
History [Note: This meeting did not take place]

4:15-5:00pm Yon 427 Exit interview with Jack Sabin, Creed Greer, & Neil
Sullivan (email invitation sent)

5:00-6:30pm TBA Dinner Meeting with Pamela Gilbert and Jack Sabin

Saturday, September 16, 2006

Departure: 7:07 a.m. on US Air

Summary of Major Recommendations:

Return 1101 and 1102 to the Department of English but with specific constraints and mandates in relation to texts, curriculum, grading, and the like, to be developed by composition specialists within the department and approved by the Dean.

Require all new teaching assistants (first-year TAs and those who are new to a specific composition course) to follow a highly defined and prescriptive syllabus with uniform student outcomes across all sections of 1101.

Require all Composition instructors to use the same core syllabus, which will stipulate programmatic philosophy, learning goals, texts, assignments, evaluative criteria, etc.

Develop a sound and rigorous orientation/training program focused very specifically on the learning goals, texts, assignments, and methodologies mandated in the 1101 syllabus with extensive faculty oversight.

Continue the mentoring of new instructors, although the mentoring assistance should be directed toward helping new instructors resolve issues and problems within the pedagogical framework of the course syllabi.

Towards these ends, hire a senior Composition specialist with administrative experience (tenured, associate level or higher) to provide support and leadership for the Composition Program.

Consider creating a Composition Advisory Committee with faculty from across the University that would report to the Dean.

Hire more than one new Composition specialist, ideally at least four, over the next few years.

Assign to CWOC the responsibility of developing UF's Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program.

Invest in a faculty-administered, large, well-run, well-funded, centrally-located campus Writing Center.

To insure that the Writing Center is developed, commit one of the future Composition hires to be a Writing Center specialist.

Faculty must begin teaching courses at all levels, including 1101 and 1102.

Do not assign graduate students to teach upper-division courses.

Make it a top priority for the new incoming chair of English to work closely with the Dean's office to conduct a careful audit of workload for Departmental faculty.

Faculty who teach more and thus carry more of the Departmental responsibility to serve undergraduate students should not be penalized for merit.

Develop a five-year plan for English that maps out intended hires, areas of likely future investment, areas not likely to be resourced, and the like. We realize this would be a challenge, but we think such strategic planning is necessary. This plan should be developed in consultations with the Dean's office and within the context of likely resource allocations to the department.

We recommend that decisions about teaching at all levels be based on student need and not staff/faculty desire.

We recommend that the English Department (or a new Department, if one is created) develop a much more focused, coherent, and substantive writing emphasis at the undergraduate level.

Strengthen the curricular offerings of the Rhetoric and Composition doctorate, which is only possible with the hiring of additional Rhetoric and Composition faculty.

Graduate students who are not majoring in Rhetoric or Composition at the doctoral level should be able to pursue a sub-specialty in Rhetoric and Composition, which would likely enhance their ability to secure academic employment after graduation.

We recommend that the Dean's office, the Provost's office, and the appropriate University oversight bodies control "renegade" writing courses—such as the new writing course in engineering—in order to bring oversight, coherence, and appropriate use of resources to the writing effort across campus.

Develop and support meaningful, ongoing assessment of 1101 and 1102.

I. History, Context, and Challenges

Professors Deborah Holdstein (Northern Illinois University) and Charles Schuster (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee) were invited to the University of Florida from September 13-15 to evaluate the University Writing Program (UWP) and make recommendations concerning its structure and placement, possible qualitative improvements, programmatic assessment, and overall effectiveness. Additionally, we were encouraged to consider how a Writing Across the Curriculum program, with a focus on writing instruction beyond the freshman level, could be implemented.

There is little need for us to review all the recent history, but suffice it to say that the previous Provost, David Colburn, removed the first-year composition program from the English Department effective fall, 2003, thereby creating the UWP with first-year composition (and another course, “Writing for Engineers”). He did so apparently based on reports that he heard from faculty, advisors, and parents. In one of the rare occasions for agreement regarding the ensuing controversies, those on every side of seem to agree that this action came about as a result of hearsay, although few if any of the faculty/staff we spoke to outside the English department thought it was unjustified. (Professor Colburn did not appear for our appointment, so we were unable to speak with him about the grounds for his decision.) Immediately following this administrative action—which included the hiring and tenuring within English of the Provost-appointed writing program administrator, a move which would understandably anger Departmental faculty—writing instruction was delivered via lecture/discussion sections in 2003-04, an experiment that proved ineffective at best and which everyone we spoke to considered a complete failure.

In 2004, the UWP was given to CWOC staff to run, where it has resided ever since. CWOC must depend on academic departments, primarily English, to supply teaching assistants to teach 1101 and 1102 (primarily) along with 3254 (“Writing for Engineers”). Relations between CWOC and English are testy and mistrustful: English views CWOC as a competitive unit, built out of the ashes of failure and with little academic credibility; CWOC views English as reflexively protective of its own turf, hostile to CWOC’s mission, and at best passively-aggressively uncooperative. From what we have been able to hear and to examine, it appears that CWOC has greatly reined in the previous freedoms enjoyed by English teaching assistants, specifying much more explicitly the curriculum, texts, and syllabi for the three courses it administers. At the same time, however, there still appears to be considerable leeway regarding what can and cannot be taught in these two foundational courses. Our report will focus primarily on 1101 and 1102, although we will also address concerns about possible duplication of effort that we see in other writing courses such as CWOC 3254, English 2210, etc.

Clearly the current situation for UWP is, as many UF faculty and administrators told us, unstable, unsustainable, and unhealthy. CWOC cannot easily sustain the administration of the UWP, at least not with its current financial and staff resources, compounded by its uneasy relationship with English. The administration is strongly considering hiring teaching assistants from other academic departments within CLAS (history, journalism, anthropology, etc.) to teach writing, a practice that is not likely to succeed if the intention is to replace English TAs in any large numbers. Our view coincides with that of many earnest, thoughtful, knowledgeable faculty, staff, graduate students, and administrators with whom we spoke: the first-year writing program at

Florida is challenged at best and only a step away from real crisis, a crisis that might be exacerbated were TAs from other departments brought in to teach first-year writing.

While in theory it might make complete sense to invite and train TAs from a variety of disciplines, especially if the goal is to create a writing across the curriculum (WAC) program, most graduate students will likely resent being taken from their “real work” and assigned to “foreign service” in the UWP. Few will have any real motivation to learn how to teach writing, an assignment that is one of the most difficult in the university and which graduate students from other disciplines will often see as punitive.

Trying to determine the facts and multiple versions of truth about the UWP is *Rashomon*-like. Members of the administration and a number of other faculty and staff state that there were substantial grounds for removing UWP from the English department; the English Department said that no substantial or substantiated reasons were ever provided to them. Indeed, some of the battle seems based on personality and history rather than on substantive differences, and the current Provost in conversation with us wisely questioned the wisdom of higher, central administration’s involvement in these programmatic concerns. We would add, however, that the writing program was seen by many of the advisors and administrators with whom we spoke to be failing in its mission when it was in the English Department, although English Department faculty roundly dispute this perception. The administration and various other individuals conveyed what seems to be an overwhelmingly widespread and damaging perception: that when it had responsibility for the writing program, the English Department provided no oversight over the texts, assignment, or syllabi of UWP instructors. As one faculty individual said to us, echoing the views of many others on campus: “The English Department explained

what it was doing, was told it was unacceptable, refused to change their policy of turning the course over to the grad students who created their own courses with little supervision/no appropriate supervision and no substantial emphasis on teaching composition. The English department affirmed it was the academic freedom of the grad students to determine syllabus, texts, content, grading. After 10 years of this, the Provost said, ‘I can’t continue to accept this status quo’, stepped in, and moved the UWP out of English. For over ten years, the English Department did nothing to change or improve first-year composition. The chair said it isn’t our job to teach grammar and punctuation.” Members of the administration and various other individuals stated that the English Department has a long history of neglect in regard to composition and the hiring of Composition Studies faculty, a view the department rejects.

An alternative narrative is related by the English Department faculty, who state that they care deeply about composition and the teaching of writing (and follow-up information and materials offers quite strong support for this contention) and that for the past five years they have held composition and rhetoric a priority in hiring, a priority denied by CLAS and the Provost. (In fact, one administrator told us, “There were very few position requests for Rhet/Comp over the last 10-15 years.”) English department faculty told us, however, “We offered a plan. It was ignored, rejected. Rhet/Comp was our first hiring priority for the past five years. Our requests were denied. Central administration has a long history of lack of commitment, bad faith, lack of concern for writing, inadequate funding.” Certainly the history of the institution in relation to budgetary resources for writing instruction supports this criticism.

Conversely, as one faculty member told us, “The English Department got mad when writing was taken out, which was done for good reasons, but it still wouldn’t listen or change what was wrong. It trained grad students but gave them license to teach anything they wanted. The grad students needed supervision. The curriculum in 1101 and 1102 was ridiculous and included sexually explicit graphic material, an e-mail only course that never met in person, instructors choosing any texts whatever, and so forth. The English department wants the composition program back, but it doesn’t want to invest intellectually in it.” Another faculty member told us, “First-year composition should be housed in English. What the Department isn’t hearing, however, is that it has a responsibility to teach writing to undergraduates. Sid [Dobrin] and John Leavey are very protective of the grad students, and we can never get them to admit that a grad student has failed or needs help. Just as importantly, the Department needs more faculty in writing.” We think those views have a lot of merit.

Again, we also understand that the English Department stated that, in response to complaints about first-year composition, they drew up a plan, and developed a variety of documents and responses (which they sent to us) that they felt addressed these problems and proposed solutions. Argued several faculty regarding these documents, “There was never any response to our having sent the proposals they’d asked for.” If so, that silence was quite understandably perceived as negotiating in bad faith.

We have read through the University five-year plan, and all the English Department documents concerning UWP sent to us in PDF form by Chair John Leavey. Our analysis is that the English department provided thoughtful and informed documents about writing instruction and writing programs, but that those documents ignored the

concerns raised by the Provost's office concerning curriculum, texts, assignments, and grading. For example: the English department cites Sharon Crowley's passionate and informed arguments (in *Composition and the University*) about the problematic nature of freshman composition as a mandatory requirement, concluding that "there is no 'universal' curriculum; the course has no content other than its disciplining function." This Foucauldian argument was likely lost on the administration, it offers only one perspective on first-year composition (a perspective highly contested within Composition Studies), and it implicitly defends (wrongly, we think) the notion that instructors in first-year composition should have wide latitude in regard to course content since the course by definition has none and serves primarily to "normalize" students. This is a subject worthy of intense debate, but not between Department and Dean, Department and Provost. In essence, the Department is addressing one matter (and implicitly defending its current policies); the administration is concerned about another and not hearing the department respond in a direct and practical manner. The administration wants first-year composition supervised and controlled; the Department responds by arguing that the course has no content and asks for six more faculty lines. Both sides have real needs; neither is communicating well with the other. We could cite many more instances of this breakdown in communication drawn from a close reading of English Department documents and administrative responses

We are concerned that the aura of mistrust surrounding English has precluded a fresh start for the Department with the current Provost, who has stated that the English Department is unproductive in terms of student credit hours per faculty and Ph.D.s produced. However, English department faculty counter that they are in fact very

productive, and that their productivity would be higher if it were not for their commitment to “C” designated courses, prior arrangements made with some senior faculty, and the heavy workload of advising/educating their graduate students. They have also stated that shifting University priorities have damaged the Department: for some years, the priority is “C” designated courses, which require low enrollments; then, suddenly, the campus shifts its priorities to SCH production, which requires high enrollments. Just as importantly, as one individual told us, “Rewards at the University of Florida are geared toward publication. Neither teaching nor service will get you tenured or promoted. There is really no incentive at all for faculty to care about the teaching of composition to first-year students.” UF’s Research One status and its desire to enhance its national reputation inevitably clash with its commitment to provide quality instruction, particularly in writing, to its undergraduate students.

What is most clear is that a chasm of distrust, misunderstanding, and bad relations exists between the English Department and the Provost’s office, and to a lesser extent between the English Department and the Dean’s office (and between English and a number of other faculty/advising units on campus, including CWOC). These chasms will not be easily repaired. They are exacerbated by the union/management employment structure at the University and are now further reified by the proposed five-year plan, which has generated a significant amount of anger, especially from departments such as English that are slated for considerable budgetary reduction. At least from the English department perspective, this reduction is viewed as punishment for its perceived, uncooperative stance concerning the UWP and its strong support for the union. (And as we were completing the final draft of his report, we heard that at its meeting on 4 October

2006, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Faculty Assembly voted to "set aside" the Five-Year Plan for lack of shared governance in its development and called upon the Faculty Senate to support the similar resolution before it. We were also told that it was also recommended that two other committees be established to propose new solutions "to the problem." Then we were also informed that at its meeting on 19 October 2006, the Faculty Senate also passed a resolution to "set aside" the Five-Year Plan because it was developed without shared governance and pledged to work with the College to develop its plan with shared governance. While we are uncertain of the implications of these developments for resolving the issues with which we are concerned, these difficult times nonetheless provide an opportunity for collaborative effort between and among administration, faculty, and others committed to writing on campus.)

Additionally, members of the English Department feel victimized by institutional politics because the April 2006 outside review recommended substantial additional investment in faculty, TA stipend levels, and support staff. Although there was little mention of the April report during our visit, we think it likely that the UF administration consider that report unhelpful because it was strongly biased in favor of the Department: its recommendations almost uniformly praise the Department, its chair, and faculty leadership while pointing to a lack of adequate funding as the source of virtually all the Department's problems. Certainly the Department is undercut by inadequate funding and is not sufficiently recognized for its commitment to undergraduate and graduate students, but we think its current problems are largely a consequence of its troubled relationship with the Provost's office and perceptions that position English as insular and unresponsive to campus concerns in regard to the writing program.

Our view of the significant problems confronting UF in regard to the writing program may not seem accurate to all parties invested in the program, but we shall state them explicitly. First, flagship state public universities typically have a vexed relation to first-year composition programs. They often consider first-year writing programs to be “basic” or “remedial.” General Education curricula also are usually not highly valued, since major publics place their primary emphasis on published scholarship, funded research, and graduate education. When viewed from an historical perspective, UF fits within that profile. With a large English department of 60-70 FTE (over that time), at most there have been only 2 FTE in Rhetoric/Composition, and during most of its history UF has had 0-1 FTE. More recently, and as we have noted above, the Department has made repeated requests to hire in composition, but in a University with 50,000 students and a freshman class of 6000+ students, it would not be at all unusual to have six to ten faculty members with a primary interest in rhetoric and composition. This view of writing was reinforced by a number of comments during our visit, including one by a graduate student who spoke for many others in saying, “Many of the TAs see the UWP as punishment. No one helps them integrate the teaching into their academic life. No effort is made to help lit and other grad students to understand why teaching writing is important---or how to do it.”

As to the current dilemma, the problems/challenges facing UF are formidable. We offer our additional perspective below, based on two days of intensive interview and discussion. First, and as we noted briefly earlier, a distrustful if not hostile relationship exists between and among the English department and Provost Fouke, CWOC, and to a lesser extent the Dean’s office. Although Provost Fouke seemed genuinely surprised

when we noted the hostile relationship between her and the Department, both English faculty and graduate students (who may well be taking their lead from faculty) expressed negative perceptions of the current—and former—Provosts. Second, the Dean’s office is viewed as weakened, largely as a result of the \$4-\$6M (the figure varied) deficit called in by the Provost’s office—although the deficit does not seem to be attributable to the dean but rather a result of shifts in university priorities and a funding formula that does not reward CLAS appropriately given its high teaching load, a claim we heard repeatedly. Regardless of the causes, with a weakened Dean’s office the power of the Provost looms large, and that can be extremely damaging given the typical distance and infrequent communication between a Department and a Provost.

Third, the primary Departmental spokespersons/advocates for first-year composition, John Leavey and Sidney Dobrin, have in their actions and statements alienated and antagonized the Provost and to a lesser extent the Dean’s office. Regardless of whether such alienation and antagonism is justified, it is clear that Provost Fouke is asking for new leadership to emerge from the Department (for one, in insisting that the Department name a new chair). Such a call from the Provost’s office for new leadership is likely to create resentment within the Department, whose members for the most part view professors Leavey and Dobrin as hard working, effective, and strong advocates for Departmental faculty. Furthermore, with Professor Raul Sanchez untenured, no senior leadership is available to replace Sid Dobrin. Yet new leadership is called for if relations between the Provost and the Department are to improve and if the writing program is, indeed, to have a “new start.”

The fourth challenge UF faces is that the distrust and latent hostility between the English Department and CWOC make meaningful collaboration and partnership between them impossible. This distrust and dislike dates back to the inception of CWOC and has many causes, including that CWOC was created in part with the idea that it would house first-year composition, a purpose staunchly opposed by the English faculty. Fifth, after listening to detailed conversations and examining documents provided to us, we think that many faculty within the English Department genuinely care about the UWP and genuinely want it to return to English because it is integral to their mission and because they think they can best staff it, train the graduate students, and insure quality instruction. Our view, however, is that their primary focus is on the graduate students—their well being, training, education, and teaching assistantships—and much less on the needs of freshman students and overall program quality. (We'll have more to say about this later in the report.) Sixth, the first-year composition program and the WAC program have strengths upon which to build, but they are far from robust in terms of budget, faculty trained in composition, administrative strength, and clarity of vision. Seventh (but closely related to problem six), because of the long history of central administration's neglect in relation to a coherent, vigorous, professionally-informed writing program for first-year students and upper classmen, there is considerable duplication of courses and diffusion of the writing effort on campus, such as two separate courses on writing for engineers (with a third course starting in Engineering, much to the surprise of even those in Engineering to whom we spoke), business writing taught and budgeted in the School of Business, a qualitative but uneven set of writing intensive courses in various majors, a relative lack of writing courses in English for undergraduate and graduate majors, and the

like. We also worry about how a Department such as English, slated for significant reduction in faculty FTE and with no long-term, demonstrated ability to hire and retain rhetoric and composition faculty in any great numbers relative to the rest of the Department, will be able to handle the immense responsibilities of developing, administering, training, and assessing a first-year writing program without significant goodwill and collaboration with a robust faculty.

In one of our early discussions, a professor/administrator succinctly described the problem facing the UWP as twofold: “What we need is a structure for the writing program and the resources to manage that structure. Structure and resources--- those are the two key elements.” We agree that those are two key elements, although we are also concerned about related issues including TA training, curricular oversight, accountability and assessment, and maintaining dialogue and trust among all the key parties in a writing program (instructors, faculty administrators, Departmental faculty, Dean’s office, Provost’s office). The remainder of this report will offer specific recommendations (highlighted in bold print) followed by discussion and justification.

II. Structural and Programmatic Options

We want to begin with a recommendation that anchors much of the following discussion: **that 1101 and 1102 be returned to the department of English but with specific constraints and mandates in relation to texts, curriculum, grading, and the like, to be developed by composition specialists within the department and approved by the Dean.** Directors of Composition, whether in freestanding programs or within English departments, would like to have the freedom and authority to manage their affairs largely without interference or oversight, similar to most faculty directors across campus.

That is, they would like to be largely autonomous. While this autonomy can to some degree be earned, a first-year writing program is always of university-wide concern. At a large state institution, for instance, a student's first-year composition course might be the only limited-enrollment, discussion-based course on a student's schedule, allowing for meaningful interaction with student-colleagues and the instructor. It might be the only near-universal course for most, if not all, incoming first-years; its outcomes, and the perception of those outcomes, affect many other courses throughout the university. Consequently, composition programs often find themselves within the glaring light of university-wide perception—or misperception.

The outcomes of first-year writing, with reasonable and realistic dissemination of information regarding what first year writing can and *cannot* do, are important components of the assessment mandated by regional accreditation bodies that evaluate universities every ten years. We hope that departmental resistance to any declaration of outcomes may have more to do with concerns over the exaggerated, inappropriate expectations of what first-year writing should do at UF than with the outcomes themselves. It must be made unequivocally clear that first-year writing is part of the ongoing teaching and learning of writing at the University of Florida. *First-year writing does not “inoculate” a student against weak writing skills, particularly when one considers the wide range of writing abilities that populate the first-year course:* a student who works hard in first-year composition and earns a “C,” for instance, will appear to have less-than-adequate writing skills once she or he takes a writing-intensive course in another department. It is **that** department's job to continue to assign writing and advance those students' skills, although there will need to be significant support in that effort

(which we will discuss shortly when we consider the needs of a WAC program). First-year composition is a beginning course for writing students who will need many more occasions to write and much more guided instruction as they continue their college careers.

A number of faculty members within English have told us they object to our recommending a “standardized syllabus” for the composition courses. Said one thoughtful individual, “it will interfere with the writing program's ability to professionalize graduate students (regardless of discipline and specialization) by training them in the art of teaching.” We understand the need of the department to address the needs of its graduate students, but we differ about what it means to professionalize graduate students and perhaps about the phrase “standardized syllabus.” We consider GTAs to be in training, and in need of supervision as part of what we see as an apprenticeship. We also believe that the more informed direction and supervision TAs have when they first start teaching, the more professionalized they will become.

By “standardized” or “mandated,” we are not suggesting that every section be in lockstep with every other, that instructors have no freedom whatsoever to develop their own approaches to the teaching of writing. Rather, our view is that it is customary and typical of many fine composition programs for there to be a common syllabus for 1101 and a second common syllabus for 1102, and that these syllabi frame the expectations, assignments, general goals, teaching philosophy, and specific learning outcomes for first-year composition. These syllabi require a great deal of work on the part of the composition director, and they serve as anchors to the program. Once the syllabi are developed, they should be subject to constant refinement, revision, and reexamination,

since there is no one perfect or ideal way to teach composition. Instructors should not have the authority to choose their own texts or assignments—irrespective of the course syllabus. On the contrary, each syllabus will make clear the specific texts and learning outcomes expected for each section of a particular course. For example (and we emphasize this is just an example), 1101 could be primarily a course in expository writing that focuses on style, fluency, coherence, structure, organization, and (YES) correctness. 1102 could then focus on argument, especially academic argument, or it might include a literature component IF and only IF the course is still writing-centered. (See Erika Lindemann and Gary Tate’s essays on this long-standing debate within Composition Studies.)

While allowing *some* flexibility for experienced instructors, it is essential that new teaching assistants (first-year TAs and those who are new to a specific composition course) be required to follow a highly defined and (to use an unwelcome word) prescribed syllabus with uniform student outcomes across all sections of 1101. Otherwise, there can be little coherent building of skills within the sequence of courses, and programmatic assessment becomes difficult if not impossible. Moreover, first-year composition must become a program: all courses should teach basically the same abilities and strategies in largely the same way, and what is learned in 1101 should be further developed and improved by 1102. Students have a right to expect substantial uniformity across sections of a course that have the same listing in the course catalogue. We also think this is what the campus expects; it is what first-year composition does at most schools and is a reasonable expectation. We think it essential that new TAs have very little choice about how they teach composition, since they are, as

we have noted, instructors in training. Moreover, all TAs, new and experienced, should be guided by the course syllabus, teach to the same goals, and use the same books in each course—customarily a handbook/rhetoric and a reader—with no variation among sections. As TAs gain experience, they can be given more freedom to vary assignments, but they should always be directing their instruction toward the common learning goals stipulated in the course syllabi. This is not an abridgement of academic freedom; rather, it is a matter of properly training and supervising TAs and lecturers, since the program is accountable to multiple campus constituencies, again, including students who deserve to have a writing program that minimizes variation within sections of the same course.

A writing program with this kind of framework requires a sound and rigorous orientation/training program and extensive faculty oversight. From everything we heard, the English department currently has a good model for training new TAs, although we think it needs some improvement. The current training program consists of a new TA workshop followed by a mandatory “Theories and Practices of Writing” graduate course and mentoring by more senior TAs and lecturers. (Note: We were dismayed to hear that “the graduate course in English is only required if you will teach in English, not in the UWP.” The course must be mandatory for every new instructor of writing.) Orientation, a graduate course, and mentoring comprise a standard model followed by many campuses and can work very well, especially when combined with informed class observations.

We recommend, however, that the TA orientation (which should be at least one week and preferably two weeks in duration depending on what’s possible with the TA contract), focus very specifically on the learning goals, texts, assignments, and methodologies mandated in the 1101 syllabus. All new English TAs and lecturers

should begin their teaching at UF by teaching only 1101, so that they can work together as a cohort and learning community. Attendance in the “Theories and Practices of Writing” course should be mandatory for all new lecturers as well as all new TAs; no one should be exempted. And that course should have a strong practical component tied explicitly to the course syllabus, not be largely (some say solely) theoretical as it is now, according to several student reports. In Composition Studies, theory and practice can and should go hand in hand, and the course should be specifically directed toward the methodology and teaching philosophy expressed in 1101 and 1102. The course thus is not part of the Composition Studies grad curriculum; rather, it is intrinsic to the first-year composition program. **We also strongly encourage the continuation of mentoring, although it too should be directed toward helping new instructors resolve issues and problems within the pedagogical framework of the course syllabi.** Most new instructors of composition need a great deal of support and guidance. As one UF graduate student told us, “I feel sorry for the students I taught in my first and second semesters. I just wasn’t very well prepared.” Providing new instructors with a syllabus, assignments, goals, texts, and a strong training program will very likely improve the teaching and learning in first-year composition, especially when taught by new TAs.

We are aware that conceiving of first-year composition along these lines may well meet with resistance from English Department faculty. All the Department’s formal responses have insisted that control over the texts, assignments, and curriculum of the first-year composition program belongs solely to the Departmental faculty, which meant (before it was moved) that it mostly belonged to the instructors of 1101 and 1102. The faculty, as far as we can determine, strongly supported this philosophy. They believed

there was appropriate oversight over texts, for example, although when pressed to cite a single instance when the director or chair vetoed an instructor's text choice, they could not do so. Their view is that if an instructor provides sufficient justification, the text should be approved—and as it turns out, instructors always found a way to provide sufficient justification. Generous as this view is, it undercuts the integrity of the composition program. Text choices must be driven by programmatic needs, *not* instructor desire.

For Composition to flourish within the English Department, it has to be accepted as integral to the Department's teaching and research mission, not viewed as a service course or an employment opportunity for graduate students. It also has to be valued as a discipline by the CLAS Dean and the Provost. We worry that Composition may now be valued for its budgetary impact and not for its intrinsic importance as a discipline. One TA informed us, for example, that English Department faculty “emphasized that teaching and first-year Composition students need to be low down on our priorities. They have told us, ‘if anything has to slide, you need to neglect your students, not your graduate work’.” This statement suggests that for at least some faculty, teaching writing is viewed as a minimal commitment.

We are further aware that the changes we are recommending will likely be strongly resisted by the TAs, who have a long tradition of independence and understandably cherish it. It was reported to us that “instructors have taught highly individualized sections here since 1980”; another TA reported that “there was a movement to standardize the texts in the UWP; we had to fight to maintain our freedom to choose our own texts.” Any faculty director will need powerful allies and strong

departmental support to assert control over this large program with its 100 GTAs. Whoever takes on the role of director, therefore, will have to be firm, collegial, and politically sophisticated in his/her dealings with the instructors, the Department, and the Dean's office—and will have to have significant input into teaching assignments and renewals. To put it bluntly, the task is daunting. **We therefore think it makes sense for UF to hire more than one new composition specialist, ideally at least four over the next few years.** The challenge here is to approve these hires without creating resentment in the other English concentrations (literature, creative writing, children's literature, etc.), if positions are denied them and they demonstrate sufficient need. Given the scope and demand of UF's five-year plan in regard to undergraduate education and writing instruction, a cohort of at least six or more faculty specializing in composition are needed. This recommendation is entirely congruent with the English Department argument in its 2003-04 "Proposal for a University of Florida Writing Program." We certainly agree with that need, but we would not want this hiring to occur at the expense of other high-priority departmental needs.

Even if departmental faculty assent to the recommendations in this report, they might not be taken at their word by the administration, who might worry that they were not sincere about these reforms. For this reason and because a well-run Composition program requires considerable staffing needs, we recommend that a search for a senior scholar in Composition begin as soon as possible. It may be that either Sid Dobrin or Raul Sanchez (once tenured) can direct the writing program along the lines we recommend, develop the syllabi, achieve programmatic coherence, all while gaining the confidence of the instructors, faculty, and administration. We are not at all sure,

however, that they will agree to our recommendations or if they do that they will want to put them into effect, or that the administration will have faith in their ability to do so. Regardless, additional Composition faculty are needed, but the individual(s) hired must work collaboratively with other Composition specialists on staff, departmental faculty, and with the Dean's office—no easy task. Again, we want to emphasize the importance of working across campus, since a Composition program is in many ways not departmentally based although a Composition director must maintain positive relations with his/her colleagues. Theoretically, a director should report to the Provost since Composition is a university-wide requirement, but in most cases the Provost's office cedes this responsibility to the Dean. Thus, most Composition directors keep their chair informed but actually report to the Dean or Associate Dean. And most also maintain the confidence of key university faculty and academic staff who are informed about the program's goals, methodology, curriculum, learning outcomes, and overall effectiveness. When English Departments communicate effectively and build strong allies across campus, that campus-wide support becomes the basis for university-wide improvement not only in first-year composition but also for a Writing Across the Curriculum (or Writing Intensive) initiative, a well-staffed Writing Center, an expanded writing curriculum within English, additional faculty FTE to support writing and literacy, etc. **It may actually make sense for faculty across the university to be part of a newly created Composition Advisory Committee that would report to the Dean.** Although unusual, such a committee structure might be called for in the current climate, given that trust has broken down at so many levels.

We realize that our recommendation to return the UWP to English with the specific mandates we've outlined above may fail. "The only way the UWP can work if put into English is if the Department embraces first-year composition as a legitimate area of academic inquiry. So far, the English department has had an unreflective and uncooperative stance toward UWP," said one individual. We think that first-year composition can be integrated within the Department, but only if it is considered "a legitimate area of academic inquiry."

If the program is not returned to the department, we can envision (with caution) the following alternatives:

1. **Keep the UWP within CWOC.** We were very impressed with the leadership, commitment to undergraduate students, and enthusiasm for teaching displayed by the CWOC faculty and its administrators. As an instructional unit, CWOC in some ways appears to be a natural home for the UWP. But that is true only if first-year composition remains isolated from upper-division writing, faculty oversight and training of new TAs, and the graduate program in rhetoric and composition that is in its incipient stages at UF. The CWOC faculty are greatly appreciated and respected for what they do by many departmental faculty (although not much within the English Department, given the historical context). That said, they lack the institutional status that is so crucial when battles are fought out over budgets and priorities. Unless the rift between CWOC and English could be completely healed (very unlikely) and unless CWOC and other academic departments could manage all the staffing of 1101 and 1102 without the cooperation of English (more unlikely), tensions and problems will remain. We think

placing the UWP within CWOC can work in the very short term, but it is not a productive or potentially useful long-term solution, despite its good work and fine leadership.

However, we think a much more healthy and productive role for CWOC would be to head up UF's Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement. As one faculty member suggested to us, "I'd like to see upper-level discipline based courses with an emphasis on writing instruction----what the Dial Center does but on a much larger scale. Writing curriculum must reach beyond the English department." We agree. CWOC already has excellent connections within many campus academic units, where it is seen as an ally in the ongoing effort to improve student writing (and communication). A WAC (including quite possibly oral communication skills) initiative centered within CWOC and with strong political and financial support from deans and the Provost could make a real difference in improving undergraduate writing. This effort, however, requires major, long-term investment. At the very least, the campus would have to hire a senior tenured faculty member, probably within the English Department, to administer this WAC program. That individual will need to hire staff members to assist him/her. Most critically, the WAC program will require a major infusion of dollars to support smaller class sizes and ongoing faculty development workshops. Both expenses are significant investments. Typically, WAC classes are capped at 22 students or fewer; are situated at the upper division of the various majors; and need to be taught primarily by faculty, not TAs or academic staff. (This is not meant to criticize or denigrate the current CWOC instructors and staff. It is simply this: Faculty carry a great deal of persuasive power across campus, particularly during budget discussions; further, students need to see that their faculty care about writing, and faculty typically know best what it means to

write within a discipline.) Just as importantly, WAC faculty development workshops must continuously be offered on subjects such as “creating assignments,” “responding to surface errors,” “responding to writing,” “editing and revision,” “the ESL student writer,” etc., for which CWOC staff can collaborate with faculty leadership.

UF has already made significant strides toward creating a WAC program. It has some courses in technical writing and business writing. The CWOC staff informed us that CWOC already is teaching fourteen different courses in ten majors and four curricular areas (such as pre-med). Students receive Gen Ed, Gordon Rule, and/or “C” credits for these courses. In many ways this is CWOC’s ideal mission: to teach students and work with faculty at the junior/senior level in relation to writing and communication. It would be a natural progression for CWOC to take on a campus-wide WAC effort.

However, virtually no WAC program can thrive without a large, well-run, well-funded Writing Center. Indeed, the UWP students and all students, graduate students, and faculty at UF could use a Writing Center, regardless of whether a WAC program is formally established. **We therefore strongly recommend that UF invest significant resources in a faculty-administered, large, well-run, well-funded, centrally-located campus Writing Center.**

We found it significant during our two days on campus that no one mentioned the current Writing Center and that it was not on our agenda. We neither saw the Center nor spoke to anyone who worked there. To say the least, we therefore do not think it is very well connected to either the English Department or CWOC. We did not meet the current director, Martin Simpson, but what we have learned via the Center’s website is that it focused on writing and reading improvement and thus defines itself as performing a

remedial function. This is a major misstep. Writing (and reading, for that matter) are skills/abilities that require lifelong work and development. Anyone who has tried to write a book-length manuscript or read Immanuel Kant can attest to the challenges that writing and reading can entail. A successful Writing Center supports all writers (not just weak ones), along with graduate students, faculty, and staff. It hires and trains writing consultants who provide informed assistance to writers of essays and arguments, theses and dissertations, lab reports and business plans, state and federal grant proposals. Although it does not produce a direct revenue stream, a well-run Writing Center can greatly increase both the writing competence and the funding success for a campus. It should be directed by a tenured faculty member (likely from the English Department), who will oversee training, staff development, and be an active consultant for faculty/staff across campus. **We therefore recommend that one of the future composition hires be a Writing Center specialist who will take on this important function.** The Center should be centrally located; or perhaps at UF, with its large campus footprint, there should be multiple locations. Frankly, we do not see how either the UWP or the fledgling WAC programs on campus can flourish without major investment in a Writing Center. (For further information on writing centers, see Stephen North's touchstone essay, "The Idea of a Writing Center.")

We close this recommendation by suggesting that WAC programs and Writing Centers can become priorities for individuals, corporations, and even foundations interested in writing improvement on a major campus such as UF. This funding/naming opportunity will likely only succeed, however, if UF makes it a long-term, major priority in its annual giving campaign. This will be difficult. As one faculty member told us,

“Writing at the University of Florida is under-resourced and under-valued. Faculty here don’t much look at student writing. It is not assigned much, at least in my department’s courses.” Turning that ship in a different direction will be a challenge, but well worth the effort for UF’s undergraduates.

2. Abolish first-year composition as a General Education requirement, making it a recommended course. One way to resolve the current impasse would be, ironically, to de-emphasize writing as a requirement on campus, which might in the long run have a positive effect on writing education. The English department’s 2003-04 proposal makes a similar argument, citing Sharon Crowley’s *Composition in the University*, which analyzes the problems that arise from having a required first-year composition curriculum. We have a great deal of sympathy with Crowley and this argument, but on most campuses, *it is not politically practical to eliminate the requirement, at least not without instituting a much more expensive and complex system (such as WAC) to replace it.*

If UF were to abolish first-year composition as a requirement, the UWP could return to English, and English could continue to administer it as they are now, with little direct oversight as to texts and curriculum. Over time, the program might (or might not) gain coherence, depending on new hires, Dean oversight, etc. Although enrollments would likely drop off precipitously during the first few years of its being an elective, the course would be forced to draw students based on its effectiveness and reputation, which might well be an improvement over past practice. That is, if an elective, the UWP courses would likely succeed or fail on their reputation and effectiveness, which might be an improvement for the program.

3. **Create a vertical writing curriculum.** Again, we refer to the 2003-04 proposal for a UF writing program, which argues for a sequence of courses from 1000 to 4000 focused on writing. Such a sequence of courses makes a great deal of sense; in effect, it is a form of the WAC proposal we are calling for in our earlier recommendation concerning CWOC. The very crucial set of challenges here, of course, involves necessary staffing, consistent budget, and major long-term institutional commitment, things that should not be taken lightly.

4. **Create a new department of, for example, “Rhetoric and Composition,” or “Writing and Literacy,” which would house the UWP and upper division writing courses, and possibly the Writing Center—and ultimately the graduate emphasis in Composition Studies.** Again, this is a very difficult and expensive option. A small number of campuses have created separate departments/programs for writing instruction (Syracuse University, University of Victoria, University of Central Arkansas, San Diego State University, and Georgia Southern, to name those that most easily come to mind). We lack knowledge of all the political and institutional considerations that would have an impact on such a decision at UF, but we can imagine they would be formidable. To create this new Department, some faculty would have to be willing to move, the Faculty Senate might well need to approve, graduate entitlements might need to be granted by the Board of Governors, GTA allocations would have to be moved from English to the new Department, faculty lines and funding would move also mostly from English to the new Department, etc. The advantages are that a well-funded, well-supported department of writing (and language studies) could over time develop strong and coherent undergraduate and graduate programs (with BA, MA, PhD emphases) in composition and

rhetoric. The negative for at least some faculty in the new Department would be the difficult relations with the English Department and the inability to teach those courses housed within English. If all else fails, however, creating a separate Department might prove to be a realistic option.

Whatever path is followed, we strongly recommend that UF develop and support meaningful, ongoing assessment of 1101 and 1102. In this era of shrinking state support, SACs accreditation, the Spelling Commission report, and the need for accountability in all academic programs, first-year composition is often a target for discussion about its curriculum, debate over resources, and disagreement about its overall effectiveness and efficiency. The UWP requires substantial resources to run well: a faculty director, course supervisors, mentors for the new TAs, a fulltime secretary, a significant instructional budget, resources for training and faculty development, to say nothing of the needs of WAC and the Writing Center.

Assessment of the UWP will likely be a three-step process. First, the UWP faculty director (with support from his/her staff and instructors) will need to develop specific, meaningful, assessable learning goals. Next, once those learning goals are agreed upon, 1101 and 1102 will have to be designed so that students can achieve those goals, and student writing will need to be collected (if not all of it then a random, statistically-significant sample of it), and then assessed to see if students are achieving those outcomes. That assessment should include both direct and indirect measures. Third, results of the assessment must then be reported to the English Department faculty, the Director of Composition and the UWP teachers and coordinators for analysis and discussion, leading to changes and improvements in the curriculum. This three-step

process must be ongoing, since the purpose of assessment is continually to determine whether learning goals are being achieved and how best a curriculum can be improved. (For further information, see, for example, Barbara Walvoord, *Assessment Clear and Simple*.)

Needless to say, meaningful assessment requires additional resources; *it cannot be an unfunded mandate*. For example, if the UWP decides to require portfolios of its students and then assess a statistically-significant sample of those portfolios, that initiative will require a large investment of time and resources. We think portfolios make sense for writing program assessment, rather than short, blind-topic essay exams or, worse yet, normalized objective tests. They are, however, a major expense in both time and money, and they require considerable expertise. *On the other hand, credible portfolio assessments benefit students, the program, the English Department, and, ultimately, the University's relations with its many internal and external constituencies, whether donors or parents.*

We would add that if investment is made in the Writing Center along the lines we recommend, it too should be assessed (though it is more difficult), perhaps by using a software program to identify and compare those who are tutored and their time spent tutoring with a similar cohort of students who did not receive tutoring. Such an analysis can help the Center determine if it is succeeding in its mission or there might be other forms of assessment that will allow the Center director and tutors to reflect and improve upon their practice.

III. Additional Recommendations:

In addition to the major issue of restructuring, we offer the following recommendations:

Faculty must begin teaching courses at all levels, including 1101 and 1102.

One of the problems English department faculty need to confront is the perception that they are not productive in their teaching (in terms of SCH produced per FTE), and that they never teach 1101 and 1102 yet insist that those courses belong within the department. Many faculty and administrators on campus perceive that the English department wants to keep composition to fuel its graduate program, provide employment for TAs so that it can sustain its graduate offerings, and maintain control over scarce campus resources. If the department truly cares about the UWP and the teaching of writing, more Departmental faculty should teach 1101 and 1102. We realize that the more constrained the content of the course, the less appealing it will be to faculty. That said, some faculty with both enthusiasm for and knowledge of the teaching of composition should teach in the UWP. The Department's commitment to the course would then be more self-evident, the sense of "buy-in" on the part of faculty stronger, and the Department's claims for housing the UWP much stronger. As one faculty member told us, "You need to tell the English department it will not survive unless it learns to care about teaching composition. English department faculty must learn to teach writing at undergraduate level."

Do not assign graduate students to teach upper-division courses. We realize that the department has made a major commitment to teaching "C" designated courses,

courses for their many undergraduate majors, and graduate courses. We also are aware that these demands have led them to assign graduate students to upper-division courses since otherwise those courses would not be offered. Graduate students can fulfill their apprenticeship at the lower-division level in various types of courses. Courses at the upper level, however, should be taught by full-time faculty (and long-term academic staff with strong credentials such as Ph.D. in hand). If this means that the English department needs more faculty lines or a change in their workload (while maintaining a teaching load comparable to their peer institutions), that step should be taken.

We also perceive a major disagreement about productivity and workload between English department faculty and the Provost's office. We recommend that **a top priority for the new incoming chair of English be to work closely with the Dean's office to conduct a careful audit of workload for departmental faculty.** We understand, for example, that some faculty count against the departmental FTE but do no teaching whatsoever because of long-standing contracts. We also understand that a number of English department faculty conduct multiple independent studies, direct MA and Ph.D. exams and theses, etc. A careful audit of workload would provide empirical evidence of the efforts of all faculty. Those who have an active teaching/research agenda should receive one kind of teaching load; those with little graduate responsibility or research productivity should be required to teach more. Once the Department, the Dean's office, and the Provost's office agree on this audit, meaningful decisions regarding faculty recruitment, departmental resources, and workload can be made. **Faculty who teach more and thus carry more of the Departmental responsibility to serve undergraduate students should not be penalized for merit.** Faculty careers often

follow a cycle, and the hard work of teaching should be honored as much as the hard work of scholarship, even in a Research I university such as the University of Florida.

Once the Department, the Dean's office, and the Provost's office agree on the workload audit, which should include an analysis of PhDs and MAs granted, students taught per faculty member, and so forth, we recommend that the **Department develop a five-year plan that maps out intended hires, areas of likely future investment, areas not likely to be resourced, etc.** We realize this would be a challenge, but we think such strategic planning is necessary. **This plan should be developed in consultation with the Dean's office and within the context of likely resource allocations to the department.**

We also recommend that decisions about teaching at all levels be based on student need and not staff/faculty desire. Decisions about which courses to offer and instructional assignments need to emphasize student learning (based on surveys and focus groups of undergraduate majors, for instance) and not centered on what faculty prefer to teach. We do not know how scheduling and staffing decisions are made, but if the Departmental schedule is built on the basis of instructor preference rather than student need, significant problems result.

We recommend that the English Department (or a new Department, if one is created) develop a much more focused, coherent, and substantive writing emphasis at the undergraduate level. Given the size of UF and its emphasis on undergraduate and graduate education, it makes sense to offer undergraduate students a minor in writing studies. That minor or emphasis might include courses in style, the essay, professional writing, grant and proposal writing, rhetorical theory, feature writing, etc. We think that

if such an emphasis were created at UF, it would attract students and reinforce the importance of writing well in 1101 and 1102.

We recommend strengthening the curricular offerings of the Rhetoric/Composition doctorate, which is only possible with the hiring of additional Rhet/Comp faculty. The current PhD concentration exists almost entirely on paper: students can enroll in very few courses and do most of their work by independent study, which hardly prepares them for success in the field. **Graduate students who are not majoring in Rhetoric or Composition at the doctoral level should be able to pursue a sub-specialty in Rhet/Comp, which would likely enhance their ability to secure academic employment after graduation.** We realize that this latter recommendation is hindered by graduate students being required to take only seven courses. We think it makes much more sense to require a minimum of nine courses for a Ph.D., but that kind of recommendation for change is beyond the scope of this report.

Finally, we recommend that the Dean's office, the Provost's office, and the appropriate University oversight bodies control and rein in "renegade" writing courses—such as the new writing course in engineering—in order to bring oversight, coherence, and appropriate use of resources to the writing effort across campus. By "renegade," we do not mean that such courses lack instructional value. Rather, we mean that they crop up to fill specific needs in various academic units and have no relation to UWP, CWOC, or the overall campus writing improvement effort. To succeed in its mission, a writing program needs coherence across campus. We understand that many courses have developed because there has been a considerable vacuum in regard to writing instruction, both at the freshman level and beyond. If a solid

program is initiated, it will need all the support and resources campus can muster, and that means the WAC program and UWP need to work together collaboratively, with the support of the Writing Center, to provide that instruction.

IV. Conclusion

We wish to close this report by citing an e-mail that we received from a faculty member within the English department. In many ways, this entire report could largely be condensed into this one series of statements, although we would want to argue a few minor points. Indeed, this e-mail might stand as a rough blueprint for most writing programs across the country. The email states that the UF English department should have the following:

- a shared belief that writing is part of what we do as a group [in the English Department]; in fact, it's the most important thing we do – other stuff like teaching advertising and film is reward for the heavy lifting of English 101;
- a writing program inside the English Department and taught by ALL members of the Department (OK, from time to time, maybe every third year), which shows our shared commitment. We do this in common. The only people exempt are those hopelessly unable to write a simple sentence. The course should not be a place to dump grad students and freshmen on each other;
- a top-down, standardized course with mandated textbook and coherent lesson plans (no variation for those who don't like the course) that is followed to the letter and means that every student covers most of the same material.
- an emphasis on simplicity and directness.

In many ways, that is the essence of our own report with its many recommendations, and we hope that our visit and this report will move UF forward toward achieving the goals of producing a well-structured, well-funded, instructionally excellent undergraduate writing program. Please contact us if you have questions or seek further clarity on any particular recommendation.