University Writing Council  
2014-2015 Annual Report to the PSU Faculty Senate

Committee chair:  
Kirtley, Susan (English)

Committee members:  
Atkinson, Dean (Biology)  
DeWeese, Dan (English)  
Klein, Charles (Anthropology)  
Knepler, Annie (University Studies)  
Leon, Kendall (English)  
McClanan, Anne (Art)  
Mercer, Robert (CLAS)  
Pickard, Elizabeth (Library)  
Smith, Darby (IELP)  
Wolf, David (Honors)

From the PSU Faculty Constitution Article 4 Section 4  
University Writing Council.  
This Committee shall consist of seven faculty members from across the University of whom no more than four would come from CLAS. The Committee shall also have four voting standing members: the Director of Rhetoric and Composition, the University Studies Writing Coordinator, the Director of the Writing Center, and a representative from IELP. Members will serve for two-year terms, with the possibility of continuing. The Committee shall:  
1) Make recommendations to the Dean, Provost, and Faculty Senate on such matters as writing placement, guidelines, and staffing for teaching writing in UNST, WIC, and composition courses.  
2) Offer recommendations for improving writing instruction across the university.  
3) Initiate assessment of the teaching and learning of writing at PSU.  
4) Support training of faculty, mentors, and WIC Assistants teaching writing.  
5) Advise on budgeting writing instruction.  
6) Act in liaison with appropriate committees.  
7) Report at least once a year to the Senate, outlining committee activities.

Completed business:  
1. The University Writing Committee was populated in the winter 2015 term and immediately began discussing the Writing Program Administrators’ Evaluator Service Report from the previous year.  
2. The UWC drafted a response to the WPA report (attached below) and shared our findings with Associate Dean Veronica Dujon and Dean Marrongelle on May 6th. (The WPA report was funded by the English Department, as part of CLAS.) Associate Dean Veronica Dujon and Dean Marrongelle will draft a summary of the conversation and will discuss next steps with the Provost.

Ongoing business:
1. The UWC hopes to meet with additional stakeholders, including the Strategic Planning committee, ALT, and the Provost in Fall 2015 to continue a dialogue about how to improve writing instruction at PSU, in response to the report from the WPA.
2. Based on these discussions, the UWC hopes to help implement changes as agreed upon by various stakeholders in the coming year.

University Writing Committee
Response to WPA Consultant Evaluator Report
April 2015

Today more than ever, writing is an essential component of professional and personal success. Rather than ushering in the death of the word, new communication technologies have generated new genres and dramatically expanded the reach of the written word. To be effective in the Internet age, contemporary writers must not only communicate clearly and persuasively, but also know how to select appropriate styles for diverse target audiences and integrate writing into multimedia content. Such skills require serious attention on the part of universities to teach real-world writing across the curriculum. From an institutional perspective, investing in systematic, curriculum-wide writing instruction at different levels and across disciplines has been identified by the Association of American Colleges and Universities as one of the key “high-impact educational practices” that facilitates other learning outcomes such as reasoning and information literacy. Students’ ability to develop these abilities directly impacts both retention rates and students’ cumulative learning. Therefore, it is vital that the university support high impact educational practices like writing that directly influence student success in and outside of the university.

The University Writing Committee has carefully reviewed the WPA Consultant Evaluator Report from July 2014, and in response, we have identified several areas that we are unable to address with our current resources. Based on the report as well as our own findings, we offer the following suggestions:

1. We agree, as per Recommendation #1, that PSU should include a clear commitment and statement on written communication in our guiding documents, whether it be the mission statement or other statements guiding PSU’s vision.
2. The UWC recommends that the university must invest in writing-across-the-curriculum if decentralized writing is to be truly successful. Writing-Across-the-Curriculum is considered a best practice in writing and allows students to develop essential and transferable skills. To that end, we support the WPA Consultants’ recommendations for a true writing-across-the curriculum program, including hiring a Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Director (WPA Rec #7), and reinstating Writing Intensive Courses (WPA Recs #3 & 6) with an expanded list of courses. The WIC program offers a key element for students and faculty across the university.
   a. A WAC director would coordinate writing endeavors across disciplines, think creatively about interdepartmental collaborations, and assist with placement.
   b. To be successful, the WIC program will need funding for WIC Assistants, faculty to train and monitor WIC Assistants, clearly articulated learning objectives, and incentives, as well as required training for WIC faculty.
3. Writing Placement—Our current Directed Self-Placement process is not funded or supported with staffing or resources, and therefore students are unable to identify the appropriate writing classes they need to receive at PSU; the university must invest in research to identify the best
placement process and allocate resources to develop and maintain a placement system (WPA Rec #8).

4. **Writing Center**—The Writing Center serves an essential role in writing instruction, but its tutors are often fully booked, leaving the Center unable to serve the growing population requiring writing support. The Writing Center needs additional staff, support, and space.

5. **Class Size**—Class sizes in University Studies courses and composition courses are higher than is suggested by all national organizations, including the Conference on College Composition (CCC), National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), Modern Language Association (MLA), and American Association of University Professors (AAUP). In order for these courses to be effective, class caps and enrollment must be lowered.

6. **Writing Inventory** (WPA Rec #5)—We agree that it is important to assess what types of writing are being done at PSU, and such a study requires participation throughout the university, as well as time and support to undertake such a large-scale project.

7. **Shared Learning Outcomes**—Faculty across PSU must come together to collaborate on shared learning outcomes for writing across classes. We need a shared sense of commitment to written communication and a common understanding of our students needs and interests. This will guide our thinking moving forward.

8. **Hiring of Composition specialists**—Additional tenure line faculty members specializing in rhetoric and composition are needed to carry out these many tasks.

We recognize that fulfilling these goals in a meaningful way requires an increased and significant investment in resources, training, and research on the part of the university.

With our current resources, we have already implemented measures to address some of the issues that the WPA consultants noted. For example, the University Writing Committee is now an official Faculty Senate committee. The IELP and University Studies have been collaborating to better serve our students for whom English is not their first language. The Rhetoric and Composition committee in the English department is developing new goals and learning outcomes for WR 115, 121, 222, and 323. University Studies has developed a new written communication rubric based on outcomes developed last year. Interdisciplinary initiatives such as the Comics Studies certificate work together to engage multimodal literacy across the disciplines.

However, we recognize that there are still many measures that we must undertake to effectively implement writing instruction at PSU in a more collaborative and systematic way. More importantly, we want to make sure they are implemented in a way that ensures Portland State University graduates are recognized as effective and ethical communicators in today’s global economy.

Teaching writing is labor-intensive work, but it is work that has a powerful impact on students and their ability to succeed. We value students’ ability to actively engage with their communities, their cities, and their workplaces, and to make valuable contributions. Written communication is an essential component of this engagement.

We look forward to further conversation about the report, and to working together to support our students’ success.