

To: Undergraduate Faculty
From: Hank Dobin
Subject: Writing Program Renewal
Date: August 1, 2010

The Writing Program has undergone an extensive three-year period of review. In 2007-08, Pam Luecke and Kary Smout led an internal self-study of the Writing Program which included faculty from several departments. In March 2009, two leaders in higher education writing program administration—Wini Wood from Wellesley and Len Podis from Oberlin—visited campus to conduct an external review. On April 23, 2009, they submitted their report, posted on the Writing Program website. Throughout the 2009-10 year, the English Department and the Dean's Office considered the appropriate steps to take in response to the external review, and set in motion a number of key changes effective for current 2010-11 academic year.

These steps include:

- Re-visioning the Writing Program more holistically as the first-year writing courses, the writing center, and faculty development efforts across the College.
- Developing a new model for the first-year writing course, WRIT 100, to replace ENGL 101/105—with a focus on more multi-disciplinary topics, less reading, more classroom time devoted to writing process.
- Asking Professor Jim Warren to serve as the Acting Director of the Writing Program and chair of the Writing Program Advisory Committee.
- Charging Kary Smout, Director of the Writing Center, to develop a plan for renewing the Writing Center, including better training of tutors, online scheduling of appointments, evaluations of sessions with tutors, and ideas for new tutoring models.
- Reducing the class size in WRIT 100 to 15 – a number that permits sufficient individual attention to each student given the intensive teaching process that includes drafts, revisions, and conferences for each written assignment.
- Inviting faculty members outside the English Department to teach WRIT 100. This year three faculty members—from History, Philosophy and Religion—will be offering sections of WRIT 100. These additional no-cost sections permitted the reduction in class size.
- Conducting an intensive two-day training workshop for the entire WRIT faculty in preparation for the 2010-11 academic year.
- Eliminating the placement exam. International students whose written English skills are less strong will be placed in a special section of WRIT 100.

The external review included a number of important recommendations that remain longer-term goals, resources permitting. These include:

- Hire a new faculty member, trained in Rhetoric/Composition, to lead the Writing Program.
- Consider implementing a second-tier writing requirement.
- Require all students in the incoming class to take a first-year writing course by eliminating the exemption for first-years with scores of 5 on the English AP exam.