

Literacy and Minnesota's Academic Culture: A Case for Institutional Change

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Professor of English, University of Minnesota

*A report presented to the Committee on the
Coordination of Writing on the Twin Cities Campus*

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Elizabeth Oliver, Editor

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Preface

At various Universities across the country, successful Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programs have not only helped improve the writing ability of students of wide-ranging disciplines, but have also led to recognition of the irrefutable importance of strong writing skills in both academia and professional life beyond. In 1994, Lillian Bridwell-Bowles wrote this position paper from her post as Director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing, examining the potential for WAC at the University of Minnesota. She outlines characteristics of both failed and fruitful programs at other universities, and proposes some general ideas for successfully implementing this important program at the University of Minnesota.

Papers such as this one, together with ongoing Center projects, should contribute to improve undergraduate writing, the Center's primary mission. Along with colloquia, conferences, publications, and other outreach activities, the Center annually funds research projects by University of Minnesota faculty who study any of the following topics:

- characteristics of writing across the University's curriculum;
- status reports on students' writing ability and the University;
- the connection between writing and learning in all fields;
- the characteristics of writing beyond the academy;
- the effects of ethnicity, race, class, and gender on writing; and
- curricular reform through writing-intensive instruction.

We are pleased to present this technical report as part of the ongoing discussions about Writing Across the Curriculum. One of the goals of the Center's publications is to

encourage conversations about writing; we invite you to contact the Center about this publication or any others in the series.

Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, Series Editor
Elizabeth Oliver, Editor
January, 2003

Writing Across the Curriculum

A Position Paper

Background

The “Writing across the Curriculum” movement, which began in Great Britain as “Language Across the Curriculum” in the 60’s and 70’s and spread throughout the U.S. and Canada during the 80’s and 90’s, is a response to growing concerns about declining levels of literacy, particularly the ability to write, among the current generation of students. According to a survey conducted by Susan McLeod at Washington State University, 38% of all institutions of higher learning in the U.S. sponsor Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) programs.² That number is actually a conservative estimate because another 10% of the respondents indicated that they were either in the planning stages of implementing a WAC program or were looking for more information so that they could start a WAC program.

In spite of its growing and justified popularity, WAC is still a vaguely defined trend. Typically, most institutions offer a first-year or freshman composition course; these courses are not counted as part of the institution’s WAC programs, but rather as prerequisites. Sometimes composition programs deliver the upper-division WAC courses, as has been the case with the upper-division curriculum at the University of Minnesota. In other cases, many other departments offer “writing-intensive” (W-I) or “writing-in-the-disciplines” (WID) courses. Most often, there is a combination of 1) a required first-year course and 2) one upper division course taught by a centralized English/composition

² “Writing Across the Curriculum: The Second Stage, and Beyond.” College Composition and Communication 40. (October 1989): 337-343.

faculty or by faculty members in departments across the institution, or by some combination.

WAC can also be simply an institutional attitude if writing is a natural part of an undergraduate's educational experience. Certainly, many of the smaller liberal arts schools function this way. For example, Beaver College in Pennsylvania, an institution that was an early pioneer in writing across the curriculum, delivers its program this way.³ Cornell University also delivers WAC with the same "whole institution" approach. At Cornell, freshman writing is taught in different departments, with each department offering its own approach to writing within that particular discipline, in addition to a second, upper-division writing-in-the-discipline course.⁴ This fully integrated approach may be the ideal; however, as the size of the institution increases, implementing and supporting a lively, discipline-specific WAC program becomes more and more difficult. Centrally-coordinated approaches have worked better at larger institutions.

This position paper will review some of the academic and professional literature about WAC, outline the markers of successful vs. unsuccessful programs, and propose an outline for reform in the way writing instruction could be delivered at the University of Minnesota. We offer these ideas for discussion and deliberation by all interested parties.

Stages of WAC Development

The professional literature of Composition Studies (also known as "rhetoric and composition" on some campuses) describes WAC as moving from its first to a second stage. The first stage consists of those programs just starting WAC initiatives, and it is

³ "The Beaver College writing program is committed to the concept of writing as an ongoing conversation conducted contrapuntally across the disciplines." *Programs That Work* 138.

⁴ Information gathered from Steven Youra, director of freshman writing, Department of Engineering, Cornell University, on the Writing Program Administrators list server.

characterized by faculty workshops focusing primarily on “writing-to-learn” theory and practice. Faculty members are typically introduced to a smorgasbord of ideas for introducing more writing into their courses. At the University of Minnesota, we are still primarily in this first stage, with established programs of upper division courses taught by the Rhetoric Department and the Composition Program, as well as many workshops and colloquia on WAC sponsored by the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing.

The second stage involves leadership from faculty members outside the traditional homes for writing, typically English departments and composition programs, and focuses on courses and research that analyze the rhetoric of particular fields and disciplines.⁵ The CISW grants and publications have laid the groundwork for moving the University of Minnesota into the second stage as we prepare for W-I courses. According to Robert Jones and Joseph Comprone, national leaders of WAC at Arizona State University,

Permanent success in the WAC movement will be established only when writing faculty and those from other disciplines meet half way, creating a curricular and pedagogical dialogue that is based on and reinforced by research. This dialogue must work toward balancing humanistic methods of encouraging more active and collaborative learning in WAC courses with reinforcing the ways of knowing and the writing conventions of the different discourse communities. In other words, teaching and research need to be combined in a way that encourages joining conventional knowledge and rhetorical acumen.⁶

Ingredients for Success

Jones and Comprone offer these four goals for successful WAC programs:

- linking faculty, graduate students, and discipline-specific research across the curriculum and in the workplace with program development in WAC;

⁵According to McLeod's survey, of those institutions who already possess WAC programs, 56% are either entering or are already well into the second stage of WAC. (337)

⁶“Where Do We Go Next in Writing Across the Curriculum? *College Composition and Communication* 44 (February 1993): 61.

- recognizing that the complex matter of coordinating research and teaching in cross-curricular writing courses warrants establishing a central administrative unit to manage WAC programs;
- changing the attitude and spirit of WAC from the missionary zeal of the early writing-to-learn workshops toward new teaching methods substantiated by knowledge of actual, disciplinary methods and conventions and by theory based finally in that knowledge; and
- incorporating research into disciplinary conventions into WAC courses.

Other experts from the nation offer similar perspectives on the development and ongoing success of WAC programs. Edward M. White, the Director of the Consultant-Evaluator Program for the Council of Writing Program Administrators and the Coordinator of the Upper-Division Writing Program at California State University--San Bernardino, has discussed San Bernardino's WAC program at length in a recent issue of the ADE Bulletin, and suggests that there are seven reasons for its success:

- The faculty-senate policy statements require an upper-division course as part of the general-education curriculum.
- The 495 courses are located in schools, not in the English department or in any other academic department.
- School and university coordinators are assigned time to monitor and support the courses.
- Enrollment caps are set at 20 in writing courses.
- Faculty development is ongoing.
- A final assessment uses common procedures across the curriculum.

- The writing requirements can be waived for students who pass an optional challenge exam.⁷

At another campus, Steve Weinberg, as associate professor at the University of Missouri and a member of the interdisciplinary faculty panel that evaluated the writing program at Missouri, recently wrote about that university's successful program in The Chronicle of Higher Education. He cites six reasons for Missouri's success:

- Including the Campus Writing Program as a regular item in the campus budget, with what appears to be strong support from the provost;
- Housing the writing program outside the English department or any other specific discipline. Thus it is generally perceived as belonging to the whole campus;
- Hiring a director who is a specialist in writing across the curriculum;
- Training teaching assistants and faculty members through regular and ongoing staff development;
- Telling students in their freshman composition courses what is expected of them in their later writing-intensive courses; and
- Rewarding faculty members so that a seemingly permanent, enthusiastic core of teachers now is involved in the program, representing almost every major discipline on campus.⁸

In short, it seems clear that WAC's survival and success depends upon stable and continued funding, a stable college or university-wide home, ongoing faculty

⁷ "Shallow Roots or Taproots for Writing across the Curriculum?" *ADE Bulletin* Spring 1991: 32-34.

⁸ "Overcoming Skepticism about Writing Across the Curriculum." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. June 16, 1993. B2-3.

development, enthusiastic faculty participation and input, WAC expertise, and the administrative support to implement that expertise.

Formulas for Failure

Just as it is easy to identify the ingredients for the success of WAC, it is also easy to identify the formulae for failure. In Programs that Work, Art Young, a well-known WAC scholar and practitioner, argues that there are six “enemies of writing across the curriculum”:

- Uncertain leadership.
- English department orthodoxy.
- Compartmentalized academic administration.
- Traditional reward systems.
- Narrowly defined testing and quantification.
- Entrenched attitudes.⁹

In the article mentioned previously by Edward M. White, we find a similar outline of the challenges facing his own Cal State-San Bernardino program:

- Financial constraints.
- Resistance to coordination.
- Inadequate Staffing.
- Dependence on the university coordinator, rather than departmental initiative.¹⁰

White writes elsewhere about other WAC programs that have failed. He responds that “in each case we can see the problems caused by importing even excellent ideas from other

⁹ “The Enemies of Writing Across the Curriculum.” Programs that Work: Models and Methods for Writing Across the Curriculum. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1990. 287-294.

¹⁰ “Shallow Roots” 32.

institutions without understanding the substructures that allow the ideas to flourish.”¹¹

White goes on to analyze the failure of an Eastern university's writing-intensive courses:

“Without faculty development, faculty in the disciplines can teach only what they already know about writing...: without small classes, faculty cannot assign and respond to writing; without a writing center, faculty and students with writing problems are at sea without a life raft; without assessment, expensive programs cannot demonstrate their value.”¹²

David Mahala, the Director of Writing at the University of Missouri--Kansas City, asks a related question: “Could the breadth of WAC's success be partly based upon the shallowness of the changes--and the lack of any real threat to the status quo--that have attended that success? What might we have done and what should we do now to deepen those changes?”¹³ Mahala goes on to offer at least one possible answer and a tentative suggestion:

The safe path that American WAC programs seem to be taking is to divorce WAC from ideology, seeking only a minimal common ground as the basis for the movement: WAC means more writing, or perhaps the dissemination of writing-to-learn techniques. It does not mean the establishment of an inter-disciplinary forum where instructive antagonisms between competing visions of academic literacy are encouraged to emerge. We should realize, though, that divorcing WAC from ideology in effect divorces it from the most lively issues of composition theory. We compositionists have raised questions about the social meanings and uses of literacy among ourselves and in our journals. The problem is that we have not asked them often enough to unfamiliar audiences in unfamiliar places.¹⁴

In short, the obstacles facing WAC programs and limiting their chances for success include unstable funding, provincially-housed writing programs, poor leadership (at

¹¹ “Changes for the Worse: The Damage of Innovations Set Adrift.” *AAHE Bulletin* (November 1990) 3-5.

¹² “Changes” 5.

¹³ “Writing Utopias: Writing Across the Curriculum and the Promise of Reform.” *College English* 53 (November 1991): 773.

¹⁴ “Writing Utopias” 787.

either the instructional, program, or university administration level), and faculty apathy or resistance.

WAC at the University of Minnesota

The national status of WAC appears to be quite healthy at many institutions, but on some campuses transitions to writing across the curriculum can lead to growth or decline in the commitment of the faculty to literacy issues. Clearly, the University of Minnesota finds itself in a moment of transition. Different entities have contributed to the first stage. Through Center-sponsored colloquia and workshops, members of General College, the Department of Rhetoric, the Program in Composition and Communication, and the staff of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing have held numerous faculty workshops in which speakers have been able to convince others outside the traditional “writing disciplines” of the worth of writing-to-learn and other WAC components.

These same units are making inroads into the second stage of WAC through the extensive writing done in the science and technical writing program in the Department of Rhetoric, the cross-disciplinary theorizing and practice of General College faculty members, the upper-division courses and collaborative efforts of the Program in Composition and Communication, and the ongoing research of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing (in work that is funded outside the Center and conducted internally as well).

The University is gifted with a large number of faculty members who are already committed to undergraduate writing programs. Now is the time for these faculty members to combine their efforts so that we might create a university-wide writing program at

Minnesota that can serve as a model for large land grant research institutions of higher learning. Members of these units must collaborate with those faculty members who are committed to the same goal. Charles Bazerman, one of the leading scholars in the study of writing in the sciences, speaks to those of us in composition studies when he asserts, “What will advance rhetoric...is not polemic but detailed knowledge which people can incorporate into their daily literate interactions. We will be valued as we provide value.”¹⁵

The Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing is poised to provide leadership across colleges as we move to the second stage and develop a program for writing across the curriculum that will result in a higher level of literacy for undergraduates at the University of Minnesota. However, we believe that we need a new structure for campus-wide coordination of writing instruction, as well as for W- I courses. Many of the changes we recommend were first proposed in the report of the Committee on the Coordination of Writing on the Twin Cities Campus, appointed by the deans of the College of Liberal Arts, General College, and the College of Agriculture. This report, “Literacy and Minnesota’s Academic Culture: A Case for Institutional Change” written by Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, who is currently Director of the CISW, is attached to this document.

What we propose is a campus-wide “**Twin Cities Writing Program**” (TCWP) that would coordinate the activities of the three existing instructional units: Rhetoric, General College’s Writing Program, and the Program in Composition and Communication. The three units should have a common curriculum, shared faculty development, coordinated TA-training, and an assessment program for all students. They

¹⁵ “Review: The Second Stage of WAC.” College English 53 (February 1991): 211.

should also consolidate the writing labs, tutorial programs, and computer support that are scattered in various places across the campus. Because its mission has been university-wide since its inception, the CISW would be housed within the TCWP to provide for the best possible dissemination of its research. Funding agendas of the CISW could be more sharply focused on supporting these new curricular reforms, one of its original goals, if the efforts of the three units were coordinated. Outreach programs (e.g., College in the Schools for Composition, the Minnesota Writing Project) could share resources. Faculty from the existing programs could retain tenure in their home departments, transfer a percentage of their effort to the TCWP, or transfer tenure to the TCWP if it had departmental status.

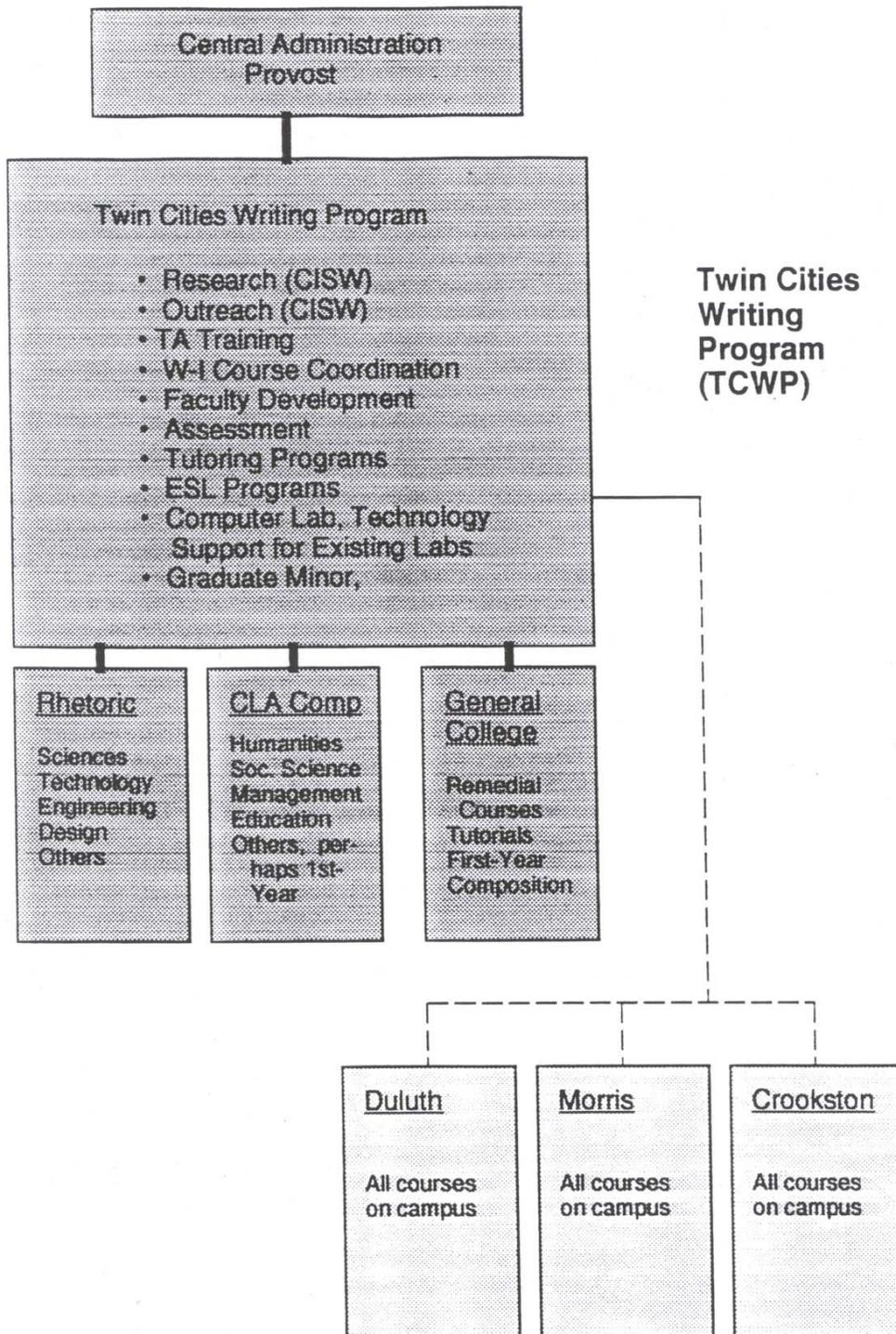
In addition, we propose a shared program of research to support the second stage of WAC development; CISW funding has already supported much preliminary research on W-I courses, but this research could be used more effectively if the proposed Twin Cities Writing Program had authority to certify W-I courses and the responsibility for conducting faculty development programs. The research conducted by the CISW and the expanded TCWP could contribute to more graduate-level dissertations in rhetoric and composition if the Twin Cities Writing Program had a graduate minor similar to that offered by the Center for Advanced Feminist Study. Existing graduate degrees would not be affected (i.e., English's Ph.D. with a specialization in rhetoric and composition, Rhetoric's Ph.D. in Scientific and Technical Communication, and Curriculum and Instruction's Ph.D. with an emphasis on writing pedagogy), but the faculty of the TCWP would design a required core of graduate courses for all the students in these separate departments. The question of whether or not tenure homes would exist in TCWP would

depend on its attaining departmental status, but clearly several new faculty members would be an asset for the writing initiatives of the Council on Liberal Education, wherever these faculty members could be appropriately housed. These new faculty members could be hired by the existing units or hired directly by the TCWP. Models for this structure exist at other institutions, notably the University of Illinois, which modeled its own campus-wide program on the CISW, but extended it to include W-I coordination and a graduate curriculum.

Beyond the structural reforms described here, the success of various writing initiatives will depend on support from the central administration for three things: 1) leadership in rewarding faculty for their involvement in WAC programs in the University's merit system, 2) sufficient instructional funding for appropriate student/faculty ratios in W-I courses, and 3) permanent funding for the TCWP. Without faculty incentives, we doubt that the University will be able to offer four writing-intensive courses for every undergraduate. Without new instructional funding to reduce student/faculty ratios, many faculty members will resist teaching such courses. Some existing funds from the CISW endowment might be used in new ways to support WAC; however, CISW funds were intended for activities that are not part of the University's traditional responsibility, a basic principle of the original agreements between the President, the proposers of the Center (including Lillian Bridwell-Bowles), and the Deluxe Foundation when the endowment was established. Even with some changes in the Center's mission, new financial resources must also be provided for instruction, which has to be defined as part of the University's traditional mission. Every report on successful WAC programs that we read mentioned stable and substantial funding for an

institution-wide program; every report on failure mentioned the absence of it. Without such funding, faculty members are not likely to believe that the University can afford writing across the curriculum.

Members of the Center staff and its Director are committed to providing forums, colloquia, and conferences where these ideas can be discussed fully. The 1987 proposal, “Literacy and Minnesota’s Academic Culture: A Case For Institutional Change,” is attached as a possible model or starting point for discussion. We would welcome alternative proposals and suggestions about the ideas presented here.



Branch Campuses:
Informal Relationship to **Twin Cities Writing Program**;
or Formal Relationship: rename program the **Minnesota Writing Program**

LITERACY AND MINNESOTA'S ACADEMIC CULTURE
A CASE FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

March 25, 1987

The Report of the Committee on the Coordination of Writing on the Twin Cities Campus, commissioned by the Deans of the College of Liberal Arts, General College, and the College of Agriculture.

Background

When we began our bi-weekly meetings at the beginning of the year, we were reminded that a similar committee, chaired by Betty Robinett, met several years ago to consider similar questions. Rather than complain that no major reforms resulted from their excellent report, we chose to be encouraged because our charge comes in the midst of bold planning initiatives across the University. We agreed that we had a one-time-only chance to propose major reforms, major restructuring, and most importantly, major initiatives to improve the quality of undergraduate instruction at Minnesota.

Our deans have charged us to think imaginatively about some of the problems we face with literacy, and their timing couldn't have been better. We have worked against the backdrop of an ambitious CLA Task Force on Writing Standards, with its proposal to require portfolios and writing across the curriculum; with the support of Assistant Vice President Wallace, who has proposed that Minnesota take the lead in writing for a 12-university consortium, the Alliance for Undergraduate Education; with the support of public school officials and the community who want us to change; and with full view of other proposals for writing projects (e.g., a proposal to CLA for a Center for the Improvement and Assessment of Writing, a proposal to FIPSE for "Assessment Across

the Curriculum”). The Center we propose here would be the sponsor for all of these activities and more.

We see our proposal as the major resolution of the tensions that derive from the responsibilities placed upon us for research and for undergraduate education. Our Center would sponsor research that should allow us to lead the nation in innovative programs for teaching and assessing writing. With this optimism, then, we describe current conditions and problems, and propose solutions to them.

As a Committee, we also unanimously agreed that our proposal is a total, integrated package, not a set of options from which to choose.

The Problem

Employers of recent university graduates value communication and verbal reasoning skills above all other qualifications, but, regrettably, Minnesota graduates do not consistently acquire these skills. Students in different majors and programs vary considerably, as does the program of study for any particular student in any given major. Faculty are forthright and loud in their criticism of their students' written performances in classes at all levels:

Causes are easy to enumerate, and there are some relatively straightforward solutions. But these remedies will require considerable institutional change and the funding to support major institutional intervention.

Four Causes of the Problem

1. **Low Levels of Writing Ability Among Freshman.** Entering student populations in the various colleges are quite consistent in their writing ability, but--with several marked exceptions--that ability is not very high in terms of the

writing ability expected at the college level. State-wide assessment of writing in public schools confirms that our students' writing is inadequate for the increased demands expected in an academic setting. Despite excellent teaching in many of the state's schools, students are not writing as much as they need to be to be ready for college-level work. The committee learned that many English teachers have as many as 150 to 170 students a day, an intolerable number if they are expected to read and comment on significant amounts of writing from each student. In addition, these same teachers often carry responsibility for all of the language arts- -from writing to literature to debate to drama—all in a day's work.

RESULT: The writing ability of students from our secondary system is consistent but not very strong, except from the best students in a few consistently effective schools.

2. **Wasted Introductory Resources.** The makeup of the student population changes over the undergraduate years. In some colleges, at least half and often the majority of students in upper-level courses did not begin their work at the University. In CLA, two to three-fifths of the entering freshmen do not take degrees within five years. Community colleges, the growing point of entry for upper division students, do not have consistently adequate levels of funding or expertise for the teaching of writing.

RESULT: The impact of introductory writing instruction on upper-level classes is minimal.

3. **An Illiterate Discourse Community for Undergraduates.** Students leaving required writing courses may write competently enough to pass composition

courses, at least at a minimum level, but writing and writing-related skills may not be reinforced in the remainder of their college experience. Students outside the humanities often report to us that the only writing they do is in required composition courses; elsewhere, short answers, multiple-choice responses, and superficial summaries often substitute for written discourse. Even in the humanities, departments often are so small that they cannot supply the resources needed to develop writing as a tool for thinking and communicating.

RESULT: Writing ability may decline rapidly after the period of formal instruction. Boyer (1987) reports that the writing ability of students at one university actually regressed the longer they were in school; he could have been describing the situation at Minnesota. [See Ernest L. Boyer, "Language: The First Requirement," from *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching), 1987, Appendix A.]

4. **Inadequate Resources and Coordination.** Not enough money is spent on the most important kind of intensive instruction that would improve undergraduate education at the University. Currently in CLA, for example, 3.67 faculty (who teach, do research, publish, and serve on innumerable committees) are available to coordinate 106 TAs who offer instruction to over 9,000 students a year. TAs teach nearly all of the required introductory and upper division courses in writing for CLA, the School of Management, the Institute of Technology, and several other units. Because TAs carry the burden, the Program in Composition and Communication, which teaches more undergraduates than any other unit in CLA, ranks 37th (at the bottom) in the College in cost per student credit hour. As good

as their work is, their efforts cannot entirely substitute for faculty involvement in creating an academic culture that values writing-- both writing in a formal sense and writing that enables a student to learn new concepts and ways of thinking.

The situation is not substantially better in the other units represented on this Committee. However, because of the scale of the problem in CLA, other units have been unwilling to share resources, justifiably hoping to preserve their meager (but more adequate) levels of funding.

RESULT: The most important work we do in training a literate society is marginalized and under-valued at the University. Redundant programs, curricula, and services remain isolated.

Building Writing into the Minnesota Experience

If we are to produce academically literate students, we must change the place of writing and writing-related skills in the University experience. Presently marginalized on the Minneapolis Campus in courses delivered by specialized programs, much writing instruction is wasted. Encouraging students to write is not perceived to be the business of the faculty as a whole.

With the exception of departments whose disciplinary methodology is grounded in writing, it is neither in a department's nor a faculty member's interest to build complex writing projects into courses. Writing takes time; carefully guided writing activities with opportunities for revision and commentary take even more time. Most faculty have not exploited the possibilities for informal, non-graded writing activities in lecture sections. Reward systems in research universities do not normally encourage such labor-intensive undergraduate teaching. Even though current research recommends programs in "writing-

across-the-curriculum” to counter declining academic literacy, no research university similar to Minnesota has successfully implemented one, despite a few noble attempts cited in Boyer’s report.

We propose a radical change in the way writing instruction is delivered and the way writing is used in Minnesota’s various curricula: a research-centered, comprehensive program to sponsor writing across the curriculum, one that will support the research, teaching and service missions of the involved departments and of the University as a whole.

Any plan for radical change must fit the culture of the University or it will certainly fail. In a recent survey in the Modern Language Association’s Profession/ 85, faculty members in research universities ranked their professional concerns. First was their place in the national research community; their own research or scholarship was second. Teaching ranked eighth. We see no reason to expect Minnesota faculty to be different from faculty at other research institutions. And we see no reason to expect selected faculty to change without a reward system. Minnesota faculty--if not all, then a substantially larger number--must see that incorporating writing and writing-related material into their courses will reward them in their own careers as teacher/scholars, and will similarly reward their departments. Our proposal offers to establish a collaborative structure so that we can provide those incentives systematically. These incentives include, but are not limited to, faculty development by membership in the Center and direct aid dispensed from the Center to departments and colleges as they develop their own programs in writing.

A WRITING CENTER: A STRUCTURE FOR COLLABORATION

General Concept

We propose a Writing Center supported by recurring, centralized funding. Some existing resources could be folded into the Center, along with the savings from efficiencies due to coordination, but new funds are clearly needed to make this proposal work. These should be found within the University, perhaps through reallocations or even through legislative specials. A coordinated faculty engaged in writing would perhaps be attractive to federal agencies and foundations, but first that coordinated faculty must be established.

The Center will sponsor research on literacy, and will coordinate writing-related teaching, faculty development, assessment, teacher-training, tutorial support, and outreach to Minnesota post-secondary institutions and public schools.

The Center will also act as a clearinghouse for funding proposals from other departments and colleges as they seek to develop new writing-intensive courses in their majors, informal “writing across the curriculum” in many classes, departmental tutorial services, plans for assessing their majors’ writing in their fields, etc. Grants will also be awarded to individuals for both basic and applied research on writing.

A director of recognized national stature will run the Center with full administrative and civil service support, housed in quarters adequate for faculty offices, rooms for faculty research seminars or training meetings, a tutorial service, and computing facilities.

Central Coordination of Writing

At its inception, the Center will directly offer required preparatory, basic, and upper-level composition courses now in place on the Minneapolis Campus, consolidating all current courses under uniform descriptions and course numbers. As writing evolves from a marginalized skill to a central means for University learning and expression, direct course offerings will be replaced, as often as possible, by principled writing experiences in and linked to disciplinary courses. Other activities now conducted separately in CLA, GC, and on the St. Paul campus, will be consolidated (see below).

Leadership and Personnel

Statewide Advisory Board. We would invite a blue-ribbon panel composed of public and private leaders to advise the Center on ways it could serve the public interest by providing better-educated, literate graduates. We would also ask the panel to assist us in setting public policy on literacy and fund-raising in support of academic literacy.

The Center Director. To be most effective, this person should be empowered centrally and should have three major responsibilities: 1) to negotiate systematically and to approve each individual unit's curricular plans for including writing in the undergraduate experience in meaningful ways; 2) to negotiate with departments as they develop individual plans for assessment to comply with the spirit of this proposal, namely that responsibilities for assessment be shared by all; and 3) to manage a series of task groups, some using the infrastructure of existing programs or departments, and others working as units of the Center itself. We describe eight possible task groups below. Some are artifacts of our present writing programs; others identify projects long recognized as

necessary, but impossible under current structures and funding. We assume the list of tasks will evolve as University needs and student population change.

Members of the Center will represent its naturally wide constituency: University faculty members, graduate students and visiting scholars, faculty of other Minnesota post-secondary institutions, secondary teachers, and representatives of the professional and corporate community with special interests in writing abilities of Minnesota graduates. Members' participation will vary with their interests. Participants on the Committee that produced this report make an excellent charter membership list, and all of us would enthusiastically support the work of the Center. We include faculty from the units that currently offer instruction (The Program in Composition and Communication, General College, and the Rhetoric Department), as well as faculty with related research interests from units such as English, Curriculum and Instruction, ESL, Psychology, Management, Journalism, and the Institute of Technology.

At this point, we do not believe that the Center should serve as a tenure home but that it should instead have affiliated faculty--all appointed in departments of various colleges--whose work while they are members of the Center will be supported by direct payment to the home departments for released time, or by project stipends to individual researchers and curriculum developers.

Some members of the Committee did raise the question of tenure homes in the Center, and such arrangements might evolve should the Center sponsor graduate level courses and degrees. We propose several relationships between faculty and the Center (see six of them described below), as well as support for graduate students and post-doctoral scholars. People outside the University (e.g., secondary teachers,

communications specialists in business and industry, journalists) would be invited to participate, with compensation from the Center going to their employers.

Specific Responsibilities for Task Groups

Recurring funds should be provided for each of the following Task Groups. These funds could be used by members of the Center or by individuals, departments, or colleges that contract to conduct activities such as those described below.

- 1. Research:** core research on language production and reception, and applied research on curriculum and on the places of written language in society.
- 2. Assessment:** analysis of writing and its cognitive bases for entering students and for advanced students in their majors. The Committee has already discussed a proposal that would establish one plan of assessment at both entry and at exit for all Twin Cities students. (See Appendix B). This Task Group would work with the “Implementation Committee” to be set up in CLA to design procedures for assessing portfolios.
- 3. Faculty Development and Writing Across the Curriculum:** programmatic research on students’ disciplinary writing; the Director will systematically consult with departments as they develop plans and time-lines for curricular changes.
- 4. Teacher Training:** training for teachers of writing, and tutors in support programs for direct writing instruction, as well as for writing-focused courses in disciplines.
- 5. Basic Courses:** curricular and instructional designs for all entry-level and required upper division courses on the Minneapolis Campus.

6. Remedial and Tutorial Instruction: Instructional responsibility for remedial courses and services; provides resources to departments that provide their own services.

7. ESL Support: classes, curriculum consultation, and tutorial support at all levels, remedial through graduate.

8. Outreach/Interaction: active exchange of research and teaching methods with other post-secondary institutions and with the primary and secondary systems statewide; in addition, the Center would collaborate with other programs throughout the country and internationally (e.g., The Center for the Study of Writing sponsored by Berkeley and Carnegie-Mellon).

Each task group will be supervised by a Center member, whose work will be supported by released-time agreements with the home department or outside employer.

Roles of Center Members

The Center will advocate literacy research and development in Minnesota. It will encourage membership from traditional academic populations, as well as from other sectors—business, government, and industry—whose everyday activities are dependent upon writing.

Some Possible roles:

1. Coordination: Faculty from various University departments fulfilling largely administrative functions (e.g., coordinating TA training, coordinating staffing for multi-section courses).

2. Faculty Scholars: Faculty whose proposals for course development, service or research have been selected by the Center for funding for a fixed term, subject to renewal.

3. Graduate Scholars: Graduate students pursuing degrees in various graduate programs, but supported by the Center for research on literacy.

4. Post-Doctoral Scholars: Distinguished recent graduates in areas related to literacy whose research proposals have been selected by the Center in national and international competitions.

5. Teacher/Scholar: Regular faculty, teaching specialists, and graduate students appointed for a fixed term to teach the courses sponsored by the Center.

6. Exchange Scholar: K-12 teachers or educational administrators, faculty from other postsecondary institutions, communications specialists from business or industry working on research or teaching projects. These exchange scholars might also teach classes.

Faculty from appropriate ranks can be convened by the Director to constitute necessary committees for searches and curriculum decisions consonant with University relations.

Immediate Organizational Changes

We recognize that writing instruction on the Minneapolis Campus is fragmented and marginalized, and that focusing it should be the primary task for the Center's early priorities. We suggest these immediate changes:

- combine preparatory courses in CLA and the General College under one coordinator with a coherent staff;
- combine training for teaching assistants for all programs;

- combine introductory (credit) courses in CLA and the General College;
- coordinate curricula and staffing for required courses at the Twin Cities Campus;
- coordinate and regularize pay rates, employment conditions, and personnel procedures for all graduate student teachers in required courses;
- coordinate ESL writing instruction and ESL-based tutorial services in writing at the Twin Cities Campus;
- coordinate graduate recruiting by making writing-related assistantships and fellowships available to all University, graduate programs;
- produce a brochure for and actively recruit outstanding graduate students to the graduate programs that already provide degrees in writing; and
- design an interdisciplinary graduate minor, structurally similar to those offered by units such as the Center for Advanced Feminist Studies.

We also recognize that change can be disruptive and unnecessary. Writing instruction on the St. Paul Campus is illustrative. The academic culture in St. Paul is markedly coherent--in clear contrast to that in Minneapolis. Faculty regularly collaborate on teaching and research; the student body is stable and identified with the communities established by their majors.

The Rhetoric Department has a full array of graduate and undergraduate service courses in writing, speech, and humanities, a clear research agenda, and undergraduate majors and master's programs in technical communication. The department provides appropriate literacy instruction for this community, and is an integral part of the academic culture. Its research, teaching and service missions are linked to the other Colleges and

departments in the Institute of Agriculture, Forestry and Home Economics. The writing curriculum was developed in cooperation with the relevant departments, and the courses in writing establish links with disciplinary studies. Literacy among students clearly develops as part of their undergraduate experience. Thus we recommend that the Rhetoric Department belong to the Center as a member of a “loose confederation,” preserving the departmental structure, but coordinating course offerings, assessment, training and staffing. Faculty in Rhetoric are eager to affiliate with the proposed Center.

Some Final Appeals

The immediate, practical, and concrete benefits of this proposal are self-evident. Some more abstract ones bear mention in concluding. We believe our proposal represents a perfect balance between the two critical stresses on major research institutions: 1) the need to provide scholarly research and leadership and 2) the need to provide a quality education for the students and taxpayers of the state who invest in the University. Along with others at the University, we are committed to scholarly research on written literacy and to providing instruction based on the best theory and research we can bring to pedagogical questions.

In addition, our Center:

- Consolidates scattered national reputations into a coordinated research group, a critical scholarly mass to attract research support and graduate students.
- Provides genuine motivation to departments to incorporate writing as part of their missions.
- Provides systematic guidance to school districts seeking to implement writing assessment programs in response to the new University admissions standards.
- Unifies literacy programs within the University with those in the State Department of Education.

- Links the University literacy research to corporate and professional communities.
- Provides the flexibility of a consensus-based academic program: fast action, growth, and change.

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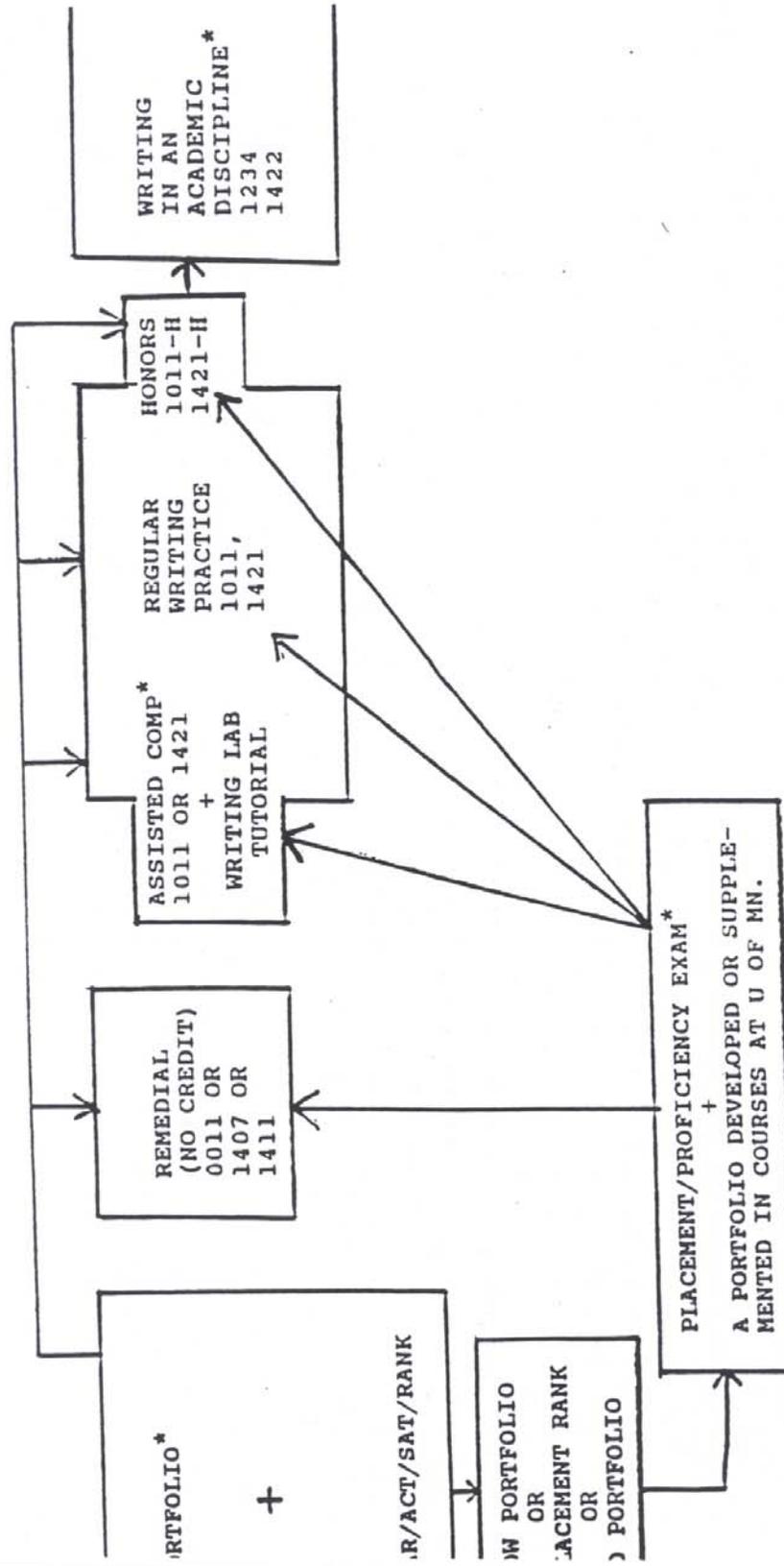
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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX B: A HYPOTHETICAL SYSTEM FOR ASSESSMENT AND PLACEMENT



New assessments and courses. All other courses exist in Composition or General College. Courses from Rhetoric could also be mapped onto this sequence.