



CENTER FOR TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Main Building 2200 • Austin, Texas 78712-1111 • (512)471-1488

Dec. 20, 1984

TO: Writing Committee Chairmen

FROM: Marilla D. Svinicki

RE: Tuesday's Meeting

Attached is a summary of the Tuesday, Dec. 18th, meeting. It also contains a sheet indicated the actions which were requested of each of us by the others. If you have any questions about the meeting, please let me know. I will keep you posted on those activities I have agreed to oversee.

Thank you for coming, and if you were unable to be there, I hope this summary conveys the essence of the meeting. Have a good holiday.

Writing Committee Chairmen

Dec. 18th Meeting Summary

The issues addressed in this meeting were:

1. the success or lack thereof of the scheduled Fall semester activities and the possible causes for the latter and possible programs and activities for the future;
2. problems which instructors of substantial writing courses were having or how to find out what they were;
3. problems which writing committees were having and how they might be resolved.

Issue 1: Fall activities

Marilla reported that there had been five workshops for faculty scheduled during the Fall semester, one general overview, two topic-oriented and two idea exchange sessions. Only the first of these had sufficient enrollment to be conducted. In exploring the possible reasons for this lack of interest on the part of faculty, a factor which seemed to receive a lot of agreement was the fact that for this initial round of courses the method for deciding on which courses to certify had been to select courses which already had a lot of writing incorporated into them. Since these faculty had been teaching the courses for a while, they may feel no need for ideas or information. A second perennial favorite which might have contributed is lack of time; there is no optimal time for all faculty except possibly in the summer. When the possibility of summer workshops was raised, it seemed initially attractive; however, a few flaws in the idea surfaced. The first was the probability that any summer sessions would be unlikely to receive financial support either from the Vice-President's office or from the Deans, and yet, were we to request assistance from the English faculty, such support might be necessary. The Center could finance most of the remaining costs, such as reproduction of materials, although we have no funds which could be used for room rental and refreshments. Perhaps it would be possible to coordinate several short sessions drawing on the experiences of the faculty who taught these courses this year. This possibility will be explored.

Mark Gregg suggested that since the faculty do not currently feel that they have any technical problems in these courses, perhaps the best way to serve them would be to establish a resource network of people who have expertise on various types of problems and to distribute information on that network to the faculty. Then when they actually run up against a problem, they will have somewhere to turn. This way we can be sure to meet their needs when they perceive that they have some.

William Bennie suggested that videotapes might be developed for various topics. These could then be made available for faculty to view

at their own convenience. This possibility will be explored.

During the Fall, two sessions for TAs were scheduled, one on tutoring students and one on general principles of writing instruction. Although the attendance was good, the content received mixed reviews. We were surprised at the number of TAs who were actually responsible for grading from departments where supposedly they were not to have that responsibility. The sentiment of the group was that sessions for TAs should be continued, perhaps with a different focus to more closely match their actual duties. The Center will attempt to organize such sessions for the Spring semester. The chairmen will assist us in publicizing these sessions by passing the information on to the relevant instructors when final arrangements are made.

The newsletter series was reported to have a good subscription list (not necessarily identical to the list of faculty teaching writing courses) and to have received good reactions from the readers. This activity will continue. In addition it was suggested that the regular CTE newsletter might include something on the success of writing courses as a means of encouraging other faculty to volunteer to teach them.

Issue 2: How to find out what the problems are

In order to plan for future activities, it would be useful to find out what problems and experiences this semester's faculty have had. Some chairmen reported that they will be polling their faculty to find out these things. John Kupersmith reported that the library staff had done some polling among the E346K students with interesting results on who was taking which course. Charles Roeckle indicated that they had discovered interesting trends in the effects of writing certification on enrollment (upper division courses had fewer students than usual; lower division, more). Both Charles and Dorothy Blume mentioned that there appears to be a real effect of these courses on student writing quality in the direction of improvement. Jim Vick suggested that such information would be valuable for the entire campus. It seems that some systematic way of gathering information from both faculty and students involved in substantial writing courses would be a useful activity. We should consider sharing any evaluation attempts, both forms and results, in an effort to coordinate information across colleges. If anyone has conducted or is planning such an information gathering, they should send a copy of their forms to Marilla.

Marilla suggested that she would like to interview those faculty who have taught writing courses and requested those in attendance to give her the names of people she should contact. Any insights from these interviews will be shared with the entire group when they are completed.

Issue 3: Problems which writing committees are having

During the course of the meeting, four common problems which the writing committees are having surfaced. The first was the problem of convincing faculty members in some colleges to volunteer to teach substantial writing courses. It was suggested that success stories from

other faculty might aid in encouraging volunteers. Any successes which surface as a result of the various evaluations will be publicized, probably through the CTE newsletter.

The second problem was that of funding for next year. Because the support from the Vice-President's office was intended to be only for one year, there was a question of how necessary TA support would be found for next year. Marilla suggested that documenting the time and support needed to conduct a substantial writing course might help convince deans and others of the need to continue TA support for these courses. It doesn't look hopeful, given the pending legislative session, but a documented need would have more success than unsubstantiated claims.

The third problem was that of when various decisions and information about these courses needed to be provided. The schedule of course certification does not necessarily jive with that of course schedule determination. In fact there was some confusion about the former itself. Jim Vick suggested that a calendar showing when various deadlines are, both for the writing committee and for the course schedule planning committees (which may not be the same group), would be helpful in organizing committee activities. Diana DiNitto added that deadlines for reports to the Vice-President's office would be a useful addition to such a calendar. Marilla agreed to look into the production of such a schedule.

The final problem raised was the question of the progress reports requested by the Vice-President's office. No one seemed sure when they were to be submitted or what format they should take. It was suggested that if each college provided similar information, though not necessarily in the same format, the task of assessing the overall program would be simplified. Marilla agreed to check on the status of that requirement.

The meeting adjourned at 11:20.

Tasks requested of Committee Chairmen

1. Provide Marilla with names of faculty in your college who have taught writing courses this past semester and would be good prospects for an interview.
2. Provide Marilla with any forms and you have used to find out what is going on in the substantial writing courses and what problems faculty are experiencing plus any data from those activities which you would be willing to share.
3. Distribute any TA session announcements to appropriate faculty when Marilla gets them organized.

Marilla will:

1. Try to organize some informational sessions for TAs in the spring.
2. Check into the deadlines and format for progress reports for the Vice-President's office.
3. Check into organizing a calendar of deadlines for course certification and so on to help committees get their work done.
4. Collect evaluation and information-gathering forms with the possible notion of coordinating what types of information might be collected in common across colleges.
5. Look into the feasibility of having summer sessions again.
6. Look into the feasibility of producing videotapes which can be viewed by faculty at their convenience.
7. Work with Mark Gregg and John Kupersmith to produce a "resource" network and publicize its availability.
8. Continue with the newsletter and possibly incorporate some success stories into the regular CTE newsletter.
9. Interview faculty about their writing course experiences this Fall.

Once again, thank you for your support of this program. If there is anything further I can do for your committee or the faculty in your college, please contact me.