

To: Writing Skills Assessment Committee

From: Lab Subcommittee (Bell, MacKay, Ruszkiewicz, assisted by
Writing Lab Director, David McMurrey)

Date: March 28, 1983

Lab Subcommittee Report to the Writing Skills Assessment Committee

1. Function and status of the English Department Writing Lab under the new English requirements.
 - a. The lab will serve a variety of departmental and university-wide needs.
 - 1) The lab will continue to function on a referral basis as a supplement to existing freshman writing courses, E306, E306Q, E306/HMN 303, but not for E307, E307 Sp, E308, E308 Sp, E308 PC, E308 PC Sp, and E308Q which will be phased out beginning with the 1984-85 academic year.
 - 2) The lab will be responsible for E106 and E206, new courses created as part of the revised English curriculum.
 - 3) The lab will function on a referral basis for students enrolled in E316, the sophomore literature survey and for students enrolled in E346, the new upper-division writing course created as part of the revised English curriculum.
 - 4) The lab will function on a referral basis for students enrolled in courses with a substantial writing component satisfying the additional six-hour general educational writing requirement. At least 3 hours of this six hour requirement must be in an upper-division course.
 - 5) The lab will continue to offer writing instruction and assistance to students at any level, including graduate, who request its services.
 - 6) Depending on the recommendation of other committees, the writing lab may be involved in various testing or placement activities, including the remediation of students who fail to meet exit-exam requirements, should they be established, or in research projects designed for the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of writing programs.
 - b. The new English requirement substantially alters and expands the roles and responsibilities of the writing lab. Currently,

the lab is largely, though not exclusively, responsible for assisting freshman level students on a referral basis. The new program creates a required lab-course sequence (E106 and E206) for students whose entry-level test scores indicate a need for additional writing instruction, and an upper-division English writing requirement (E346), and requires writing instruction in courses across the entire university curriculum. Consequently, the writing lab will be regularly assisting students at every level of ability, from basic to advanced, and in every discipline. It will change from a "freshman English" lab to a cross-disciplinary, upper and lower-division facility.

- c. The creation of the E106 and E206 courses, to be designated in the College of Liberal Arts catalogue (1983-85) as "Rhetoric and Composition Lab," makes the lab a permanent and necessary part of the English program. Consequently, it must be funded on a regular basis during the long terms and during the summer sessions. Funding must be provided not only for staffing, but for the ordinary expenses incurred in running the lab (books, materials, secretarial time) either through an increase in the English Department's M.O.&E. or through a separate Writing Lab budget.

2. Current and projected use of Writing Lab facilities.

- a. Clients of the Writing Lab presently include foreign students, students referred by faculty in the English Department, and students scoring below 350 on the ECT test. During the last three years, the average number of students assisted each hour/week, along with the average staff hours, is as follows:

<u>semester</u>	<u>avg students/hr</u>	<u>avg student hrs/wk</u>	<u>avg staff/hr</u>
fall	6	210	3
spring	4	140	2
summer	10	350	3

- b. When the new English program and general education requirements are implemented, the probable result will be a substantial increase in lab referrals.
- 1) Students with SAT scores below a level yet to be determined will be required to take E106 or E206.
 - 2) Students in the "substantial-writing-component courses" in disciplines other than English are likely to be referred to the lab to improve grammatical, mechanical, and organizational skills.

--A spring, 1983 poll of instructors of Business Communication in the College of Business revealed that 5 to 10 percent of students in each class would be referred to the Writing Lab for additional instruction and drill.

- 3) Communications students who fail the Grammar-Spelling-Punctuation test (GSP) required by their college will likely use the lab to improve their skills. Beginning in the Fall, 1983, all students enrolling in upper-division Radio-Television-Film classes must pass the GSP test with a score of 72%. Based on past experience, 61% of the students will fail on the first try.

- c. A conservative estimate of students expected to need and use the Writing Lab is as follows:

class	total students	est % in lab	max students/week	students/hr	no. of wks in lab	total students/semester
freshman	4,500	10	675 ¹	19	12	8,100
sophomore	4,000	5	200	6	5	1,000
junior	4,250	5	213	6	5	1,063
senior	6,250	7	438 ²	13	4	1,750
communication	360	?	?	?	?	?
max students/wk (1-hr visits)			1,526 = 44	students/hr (35 hrs open/wk) ³		12,015
				max students/sem (1-hr visits)		26 students/hr (35 hr/wk for 13 weeks) ⁴

- Notes: 1) This figure of 675 is based on an estimated 5% of this group required to take E106 and 5%, E206;
 2) this figure of 438 actually represents an estimate for both of the required courses with a substantial writing component;
 3) the figure of 44 students per hour is unrealistic, since it assumes all five groups will attend the lab every week throughout the semester;
 4) the figure of 26 students per hour is a better estimate of a peak time in the Writing Lab, since it takes into account the fewer total visits by the last four groups.

- d. We estimate that the Writing Lab will serve approximately four times as many students in the near future as it does currently. These estimates apply to both the fall and spring semesters, but not to the summer sessions.

- e. A special problem attends the implementation of the E106 and E206 lab courses during the five-week summer sessions.
- 1) On the average, 75% of the approximately 400 provisional students admitted in the summer term will be required to take E206. The remaining 25% will take E106. Together, the two courses will generate 700 hours of lab instruction per three hours of instruction.
 - 2) During the compressed summer session (6 weeks), students receive 7.5 hours of instruction per week (1.5 hours per day x 5 days = 7.5 hours of instruction per week). Consequently, given two six week sessions, the E106 and E206 requirement would generate 875 hours of lab instruction per week or approximately 25 students per hour for provisional students alone.
 - 3) As a consequence, additional staffing for the summer sessions may be necessary.

3. Materials and Equipment

- a. At present the lab has the following materials and equipment:

3 file cabinets
3 computer terminals
6 books/20 copies each
miscellaneous furniture items: desks, chairs, tables, etc.

The equipment and materials listed above are sufficient to serve approximately 8 students per hour. With the anticipated increase in students using the Lab, the present equipment and materials will be inadequate.

- b. To correct this situation and to meet the needs of the students and professors, the Committee suggests the following equipment and materials be obtained:

- 7 computer terminals. These will enable the Lab to provide testing and instructional facilities for 10 of the average 26 students per hour in the Lab and will reduce the staff's grading and recordkeeping duties enormously.
- 25 copies of 20 books. These books are a part of the basic instructional materials students use in the Lab.

- 1 IBM Diablo Printer. The printer will be used to generate printed tests, exercises, and instructional materials, and produce printed copies of those portions of CAI assignments where students actually write sentences or paragraphs on the computer.
- Additional furniture. This will include extra tables, chairs, file cabinets, shelves, partitions.
- 1 IBM Correcting Selectric III Typewriter. This is needed to execute the anticipated additional clerical chores.

4. Facilities

- a. At present the Lab is housed in Parlin 3. This room (35 x 20 feet) can comfortably handle only 12 students and lab assistants per hour. The projected increase in lab use will require expansion of this facility. The Committee recommends that Parlin 3 be immediately expanded by combining Parlin 1 and 3. This can be accomplished by either removing the wall separating the two rooms or by placing one or two doorways between the two rooms. This modification would increase the available space from 700 to 1400 square feet.
- b. Should the expanded lab prove unable to handle the increased numbers of students using its services, the committee suggests that another, larger facility be found for it in or near the English Department or that the current lab be augmented by conveniently located satellite labs across the campus.

5. Staffing of the Writing Lab

- a. The lab is currently staffed by TA's who generate 105 instructional hours, by a half-time assistant director, and by a director on half or three-quarters time (depending on the semester). There are fifteen hours of secretarial support.
- b. An increase in the number of students assigned or referred to the lab will increase the number of TA's needed to staff the lab. Moreover, the subcommittee recommends an expansion of lab hours beyond the current 35 to allow instructional services in the evenings.
 - 1) Approximately one-third to one-half of current English Department TA's are regularly assigned one-quarter time

to the lab. This proportion could be increased.

- 2) English TA's with two semesters of classroom observation experience might be assigned half-time to the lab in subsequent semesters.
 - 3) TA's newly assigned to the lab should be required to attend short orientation sessions designed to prepare them for working in the facility.
- c. A full time assistant director position should be established for the lab, filled by two half-time Assistant Instructors.
 - d. The position of Lab Director should be filled by a tenured or tenure-seeking member of the English Department with an appropriate teaching load reduction.
 - 1) The continuity of lab development and the maintenance of lab quality require a director who carries the responsibilities of a regular university position.
 - 2) The lab director must be able to serve on university and departmental committees where decisions are made about the lab.
 - e. A three-quarters or full-time secretarial position should be assigned to the writing lab.

6. Additional recommendations

- a. Efforts should be made to publicize the availability and offerings of the Writing Lab to students in all writing-related courses.
- b. The lab should be encouraged and supported in its efforts to obtain grants for the development of Computer-Assisted Instructional programs in composition.