

# **Proposal to Implement the Recommendations of the University Council Committee to Examine the Undergraduate Writing Program**

**Submitted by the Division of Rhetoric and Composition**

May 19, 1994

On March 21, 1994, the University Council approved the Report and Recommendations of the University Council Committee to Examine the Undergraduate Writing Program. The report was presented to the University Council by the chair of the committee, Professor Wallace Fowler. Six of the thirteen recommendations directly involve the Division of Rhetoric and Composition, and all thirteen potentially affect the DRC. The six recommendations that most directly concern the DRC are:

1. Fully implement the Undergraduate Writing Center as rapidly as possible to serve all undergraduate students;
2. Train faculty to teach writing effectively, which includes workshops and ongoing consultation;
3. Train graduate students to assist faculty, which also involves workshops and ongoing consultations;
4. Appoint a campus-wide Writing Committee that would act as an advisory board for the Undergraduate Writing Center and would make recommendations to enhance writing instruction;
5. Maintain a library of materials specific to the teaching of writing;
6. Offer adjunct writing courses using AIs in particular disciplines whom the DRC would train and monitor.

Beyond these recommendations the DRC has also received requests during the 1993-94 academic year to become involved in outreach activities to the public schools and in minority recruitment and retention.

We propose to work toward fulfilling each of these recommendations and requests through the Undergraduate Writing Center. The primary mission of the UWC at present is to offer one-on-one tutoring in writing for undergraduates. This mission can be expanded to support the teaching of writing throughout the campus by activities such as consulting with faculty, making short invited presentations on specific issues such as report writing, and offering training to TAs and AIs in other disciplines on issues concerning the teaching of writing. The UWC can also be valuable in efforts to improve the teaching of writing in the schools and to recruit and retain minority undergraduates. The new location of the UWC next to the Student Microcomputer Facility on the second floor of the Flawn Academic Center is ideal for this multipurpose mission. The level of resources allotted to the UWC will determine what it can achieve.

## **The Mission of the Undergraduate Writing Center**

One-to-one work with students is the central feature of most writing centers including our Undergraduate Writing Center. Individual sessions, scheduled for 45 minutes, offer students intensive, expert assistance that even the most dedicated, tireless classroom teacher cannot provide. The UWC can help to promote more and better teaching of writing throughout the university by supporting faculty who assign writing. Graduate and undergraduate consultants in the writing center have training in writing instruction that many faculty lack. They can advise students in both small and large matters of writing, ranging from details of grammar, mechanics, and style to more global issues of organization and audience awareness. UWC consultants also supplement faculty efforts to develop students as critical thinkers. They help students to define their topics, to critique ideas in drafts, and to consider the rhetorical effectiveness of their writing--work that is crucial to the goal of establishing a writing-intensive learning environment at the University of Texas at Austin.

UWC consultants are trained to work with students whose written work exhibits linguistic differences from Standard English that often frustrate teachers without specialized training. Writing centers at other universities are an important part of efforts to recruit and retain minority students, and the UWC will be strongly committed to minority student retention.

The best descriptions of how one-to-one consultations help students mature as writers come from students themselves. One undergraduate described his work with a UWC consultant: "Teachers, in my experience, never got as intimately involved with an essay as this consultant did. Rather than pointing out mistakes, she offered suggestions--ways in which I could perhaps present myself in the way that I wanted to. She helped me to think about the tone of my writing and asked questions that caused me to think more critically about what I was trying to say."

**Estimate of Use:** Statistics from writing centers at large public universities such as Ohio State University, Penn State University, Purdue University, and the University of Illinois at Champaign/Urbana suggest that the number of student visits to the writing center during the long-term semesters will number between 20 and 25 percent of the undergraduate student body. (Students average just over two visits; thus the number of students served will be approximately half the number of total visits.) The total undergraduate enrollment at the University of Texas at Austin was 35,206 for Fall 1993 and 32,975 for Spring 1994. Based on similar enrollment figures for 1994-1995, we anticipate between 3,521-4,400 visits for Fall 1994 and 3,297-4,122 visits in Spring 1995, for a total of between 6,818-8,522 visits during 1994-1995.

## **What is Needed Now**

The Undergraduate Writing Center plans to provide services to all undergraduate students shortly after the beginning of the fall semester 1994. During the 1993-1994 academic year the Undergraduate Writing Center was

restricted to students enrolled in courses in the Division of Rhetoric and Composition and the Department of English. Even with this restriction and a temporary location in Parlin Hall, the UWC proved to be a very popular facility, serving close to a thousand students in its first year. The opening of the UWC to all undergraduates in a highly visible location in the FAC next to the Student Microcomputer Facility no doubt will greatly multiply the number of students seeking help with their writing. Consequently, the DRC plans to concentrate its resources on getting the UWC off to a good start in its new location.

### **Undergraduate Consultants**

To meet the high student demand that the UWC is expected to generate, the DRC created a course to train undergraduate peer consultants who will augment the graduate students assigned to staff in the UWC. Writing centers at other universities have been successful in using undergraduate consultants when they are closely supervised. Undergraduate consultants offer a valuable perspective on the needs of undergraduate students, and they are effective role models. The UWC requests a budget to pay the undergraduate consultants who have been trained.

### **On-line Resources**

The UWC will also provide on-line resources that students can access from remote locations. These resources will include tools (e.g., *Daedalus Respond*, *Writer's Helper*) that have proven effective in helping students identify and correct problems in their own writing. Other tools will include on-line resources offering information on topics such as grammar and usage. These and other resources, such as a Frequently Asked Questions file, will also be available for 24-hour dial-up access.

On-line conferencing is an effective means of helping students who cannot physically come to the UWC. During working hours students can log in to the UWC's computer network via modem or other network access, transmit a draft essay, lab report, or other project, and schedule an individual electronic conference with a writing consultant. Students will receive a transcript of the discussion for later reference as they work independently. After hours, students may send queries by e-mail to the UWC, which consultants will answer the next day. A server is needed to make on-line resources available, and the UWC requires three additional computers to provide direct on-line consulting.

### **Library of Writing Materials**

Finally, the University Council Committee recommended that a small collection of materials specific to the teaching of writing be assembled and made available to faculty and graduate student instructors. Plans for the new facility in the FAC include a library area, and keeping this collection in the FAC will make it accessible to faculty in various departments.



	TOTAL: \$32,502	TOTAL:	\$125,001

**What is Needed in the Future**

**1. The Undergraduate Writing Center should remain open in the summer.** At present there are no resources available for keeping the UWC open during the summer. The DRC will offer 34 sections of E 306 during summer 1994. Five Preview sections and seven Student Success Program sections are addressed to minority students. In addition, nearly a hundred sections of Substantial Writing Component courses are offered during the summer.

With summer funding, the UWC would also play a major role in supporting university efforts in minority recruitment and retention. Individual UWC consultants would adopt specific sections of E 306 Rhetoric and Composition in the Student Success and Preview programs, as well as Developmental Writing courses offered by the Texas Academic Skills Program. Each UWC consultant would work closely with students in one of these sections, providing individual attention and establishing a mentoring relationship. Consultants working in the UWC during the summer would also participate in a special training program, orienting them to the special needs of minority students.

One of the challenges facing writing instructors at the University is that freshmen are frequently not prepared for the kind of writing expected of them in college. Staying operational during the summer would permit the UWC to begin offering workshops for teachers at secondary schools. Aside from the advantages of working together toward common goals in writing instruction, the workshops would contribute toward a productive relationship between the University and Texas schools.

**UWC 1995 Summer Budget**

Requested Funds		DRC Contribution	
12 consultants (6 graduate, 6 undergrad.)	\$32,382	Maintenance & operations	\$300
Director's salary	\$11,700		
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$44,082</b>	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$300</b>

**2. The Undergraduate Writing Center in connection with the Center for Teaching Effectiveness could offer workshops for faculty and graduate students in various disciplines and provide ongoing consultation.** Two critical recommendations of the University Council Committee are to train faculty and graduate students to use writing to increase student learning and to train graduate students to assist faculty in evaluating writing. Workshops with

ongoing consultation at other universities have proven effective when faculty are given incentives to attend. Especially effective are workshops led by faculty from content disciplines who are noted for their effective teaching of writing.

A pilot project could involve forty faculty--ten each from four colleges--who would be involved in a year-long project to improve the teaching of writing in their classes. The project would be led by effective teachers of writing from each college who would work with a faculty member from the Division of Rhetoric and Composition in devising workshops and ongoing activities. Two Assistant Instructors would help in preparing materials and in implementing ideas from the discussions. The AIs would work directly with graduate students in the respective colleges.

Each participating faculty member would receive a \$250 development grant, and each workshop leader from the respective colleges would receive a \$500 development grant. Since faculty often have the most time for development activities during the summer, these recommendations also would be enhanced if the UWC were open during the summer.

### UWC Faculty Development Budget

Requested Funds		DRC Contribution	
Faculty development grants	\$12,000		
2 Assistant Instructor stipends	22,300		
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$34,300</b>	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$0</b>

**3. The Undergraduate Writing Center could offer additional electronic services to faculty and graduate instructors.** The UWC could also use electronic resources in its work with university faculty through discussion groups and an electronic conferencing system. This combined approach would give quick access for advice on matters of writing as they come up during the semester. The exchange of information would be reciprocal. The more UWC staff knows about writing in particular courses, the better they can assist students. A state-of-the-art conferencing system such as Caucus could facilitate this ongoing exchange of information.

### UWC On-line Costs

Requested Funds		DRC Contribution	
Caucus electronic conferencing (UT site license)	\$30,000		
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$30,000</b>	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$0</b>

**UWC Summary Budget  
Requested Funds and DRC Contributions**

<b>Budgets</b>	<b>Requested Funds</b>	<b>DRC Contribution</b>
Start-up Costs	\$15,375	\$9,169
1994-95 Academic Yr Budget	\$32,502	\$125,001
1995 Summer Budget	\$40,182	\$300
Faculty Development Budget	\$34,300	\$0
On-line Conferencing Costs	\$30,000	\$0
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>\$152,359</b>	<b>\$134,470</b>