

August 24, 2008

***Executive Summary: Writing throughout the Auburn University
Experience: Report and Implementation Plan from the Writing Initiative
Task Force***

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Faculty in higher education increasingly feel the pressure of preparing students to succeed in an era of exponentially increasing knowledge. However, faculty also recognize that if students are to succeed as educated and responsible citizens it is not sufficient to “know it all”. Rather our students must also be able to articulate and share their knowledge with other experts in their discipline as well as the general public. Excellent written communication is integral to all disciplines and it is a competency that improves not simply by writing more, but by writing with revision and expert feedback.

Given this reality, faculty in all disciplines at Auburn University recognize that they share the responsibility for preparing students to write well with their colleagues in composition. The writing program developed by the Writing Initiative Task Force (WITF) is designed to foster a culture of writing throughout the college experience. This program has three major goals.

1. Reduce the class size of all freshman composition courses to 19 students or less

Nationally recommended standards for freshman composition courses published by the National Council of Teachers of English set the course limit to 20 students and recommend that each instructor have no more than three sections. Therefore, the WITF recommends that Auburn gradually reduce enrollment from 25 to 19 students beginning in Spring 2009. This would be accomplished over the next three years by reducing enrollment in each section of ENGL 1100 and 1120 by 1 student/semester.

To support this expansion of the Freshman Composition program the WITF also recommends that five additional faculty positions in rhetoric and composition be given to the Department of English over the next three years. These faculty will provide support for instruction, faculty development and training of GTAs and tutors in rhetoric and composition.

2. Initiate a Writing in the Disciplines (WID) program for each undergraduate major

Based on its review of WID programs at various universities the WITF recommends that Auburn University initiate an outcomes-based WID program in which each discipline addresses the question “What writing competencies must students in this discipline master to be successful”? Outcomes-based approaches are widely used by professional accrediting bodies such as the American Board of Engineering and Technology and Auburn University’s accrediting body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and have the advantage of engaging disciplinary experts in the development of outcomes and their assessment. The WITF recommends the hiring of a Writing Programs Administrator

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(WPA) to oversee the writing program, faculty development for writing in the disciplines and direct the Writing Center. The individual hired into this position should be a nationally recognized individual with experience in three areas: writing programs administration, faculty development in disciplinary writing, and research on effective undergraduate writing programs. The WITF also recommends the appointment of a Campus Writing Board to develop policies and guidelines for the development of writing programs in the majors, review documentation by the WPA and synthesize results from departmental data to make annual policy recommendations to the WPA for increasing student proficiency in writing and to advise the WPA, the Biggio Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning and the Auburn University National Writing Program site on faculty development.

3. Increase the capacity of the Writing Center to provide support for all students

The WITF recommends that the capacity of the English Center be increased to support all undergraduate writing at Auburn University. Initially, this will require hiring additional tutors and expanding the size of the English Center so that it can support all writing in the Core Curriculum in the coming year. Space for a Writing Center that can support the WID program, including the offices for the WPA and the writing program staff and facilities for faculty development should be identified in the coming year and when completed, the English Center should be merged into it to provide a single writing center, convenient to the Auburn campus community, where all members of the campus community, from students to faculty, can find expert support for writing.

Fully realized this program will impact the educational experience of *every Auburn student*. It includes recommendations to improve the writing experience for students at every level in their Auburn education. Recommendations for support of the freshman composition program will provide resources to provide students with a strong foundation in writing while the writing in the disciplines program will build on this foundation and expand student experience to include exposure to discipline-specific forms and genres. At all levels this program provides additional support for student writing through tutoring support that is not limited to simple editing but supports the development of critical thinking and reasoning. The central Writing Center will provide a venue for cross-disciplinary discourse and research on the teaching of writing.

Opportunities for assessment are integrated throughout the program, from the assessment of freshman composition program already in place, to the continual assessment that is fundamental to an outcomes-based program for writing in the disciplines. The recommendation of a Campus Writing Board with oversight responsibilities provides assessment at the University level. Through the Writing Center, the program provides opportunities for research on the teaching of writing and the impact of this program on the educational experience of Auburn University undergraduate students.

Adequate new funding is critical to ensuring the success of this program. Fully realized this program will impact the educational experience of *every Auburn student* and help ensure their futures as educated and responsible citizens not only of Alabama but of the world.