

**Writing Program
University of La Verne**

External Peer Review

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by Judy Olson, Ph.D.

Lecturer, Cal-State Los Angeles

This report supplements the Undergraduate Composition & Creative Writing Program Review completed October 1, 2008. It is based on observations of two classes, one section of WRT 110 and one of WRT 111, conducted on March 23, 2009; on discussion about the program with Sean Bernard and Catherine Irwin; on the 2007 and 2008-2009 Writing Program Faculty Handbooks; and on a review of the October report. This report responds to the following elements of the program review:

- a. Learning outcomes;
- b. Program capacity (curriculum, facilities, resources, etc);
- c. Methods and procedures to assess learning outcomes;
- d. Action recommendations made in the program review document; and
- e. Further recommendations for action.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Learning Outcomes are divided into two Skill Areas, the Writing Process and Research and Reading Comprehension. The first two Outcomes in Skill Area A (the Writing Process) are appropriate and clearly articulated. I would make the following minor revisions: for Outcome 1, replace the phrase beginning “by applying” with “while adhering to the conventions of Standard American English.” The uncorrected sentence sounds like the SAE “fundamentals” alone will accomplish effective, purposeful communication. For Outcome 2, at the end of the sentence: “editing of mechanics using Standard American English.” Outcome 3 does not represent learning outcome expectations as universally as the first two Outcomes do and seems in some ways to be

in conflict with the process orientation of the program as a whole. My recommendation is to replace Outcome 3 with one calling for some understanding of writing across the disciplines, familiarity with some of the differences in writing conventions from discipline to discipline. The information literacy outcomes under Skill Area B emphasize proper documentation, analysis and evaluation of sources, but the skills needed to find the sources in the first place aren't mentioned; a fourth Outcome might be added to address this.

For the minor in Creative Writing, under Outcome 2, change "throughout history" to "through history" to avoid suggesting that an exhaustive survey of history is undertaken. I would also suggest removing "the causes of." For Outcome 4, perhaps "create compositions" instead of "compose" them.

PROGRAM CAPACITY

The Writing Program curriculum offers a coherent, clearly and thoroughly articulated sequence of academic writing classes and careful placement process. The Faculty Handbook is thorough and helpful. Syllabus guidelines for each class are clearly presented and explicitly connected both to the appropriate Learning Outcomes and to the University's Mission. Syllabus guidelines and example syllabi reflect a reasonable progression of skills in writing academic critical analysis and research papers. The program is generally coherent, and this coherence is reflected in the syllabus guidelines and sample syllabi. Based on the classes and sample syllabi I've seen, the Program seems to skew toward a Cultural Studies emphasis strongly enough to warrant perhaps being made explicit. The "modes" Outcome discussed above seems not to fit the

Cultural Studies, writing-as-discovery, process orientation of the rest of the Program. Although syllabi seem to reflect some concern about teaching disciplinary writing conventions across the curriculum, interdisciplinarity isn't mentioned in the Learning Outcomes. On the other hand, this reviewer agrees with the current Writing Program Director that the use of literary analysis assignments and literary texts is appropriate, given the Mission and identity of both the University and the Program.

The classes observed, however, did not reflect the clear progression of skills suggested by the documentary materials. On the contrary, the section of WRT 111 I visited seemed focused on skills more elementary than those practiced in the section of WRT 110 I saw. If I hadn't been told, I would have thought the 111 was the lower-level class. While the objectives and appropriate activities are clearly articulated in the Handbook, consistent execution seems to be still an issue. This inconsistency is reflected in the October report, which points out that students report feeling greater competence in learning outcomes when they take classes from full-time faculty. Program administrators have begun to take steps to address this issue. They are pursuing adding two more badly-needed full-time Composition & Rhetoric specialists. Besides allowing more of the composition classes to be staffed by full-time faculty members, this would also increase available mentors for the part-time faculty members. I recommend, in addition, that some more-experienced part-time faculty members might also take on compensated mentoring responsibilities. They could help with the evaluation of less-experienced faculty members. A collegial, rather than punitive, spirit might be fostered this way, besides the logistical problems it would solve, and less-

experienced faculty members in the process of becoming normed to the standards of the campus might feel some ownership of those standards.

Efforts to standardize the curriculum made in the last few years have yielded impressive results, but efforts to enforce the new standards inevitably result in further burdening all individual faculty members concerned. They add to the workload of the full-time faculty members and make greater demands on the already-strained time and energy of the part-time members. Part-time members should be fairly compensated for the greater demands made on their time to attend meetings, engage in the mentoring process, copy papers and grades, and other supervision and norming activities. Senior part-time members should be compensated for helping the full-time members with mentoring and supervising.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES TO ASSESS LEARNING OUTCOMES

Rubrics have been developed to standardize assessment, and this is a step in the right direction, but measurements of actual learning outcomes are needed. Perhaps a portfolio system could be developed for the developmental-level classes and/or the more inexperienced teachers, as well as periodic (compensated) norming sessions. Including tutors from the Learning Enhancement Center in these sessions might help the program achieve a “stronger pedagogical connection with the Learning Enhancement Center,” as the report recommends.

ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN THE PROGRAM REVIEW DOCUMENT

The Writing Program is currently in the process of implementing the first recommendation, to hire two additional full-time faculty members. It has also begun

addressing the second, by developing standardized rubrics for written assessment that are directly linked to the GE Written Communications learning outcomes. However, there are currently insufficient mechanisms for ensuring consistent application of the rubrics. The third, developing a creative writing major, would further solidify the Program's identity as one oriented toward literary composition, creative writing and cultural studies, which is furthermore consistent with the University's Mission. This orientation might be made more explicit in the Program materials. The fourth recommendation is quite reasonable, and the fifth desirable, but all involved should be compensated for their time. I agree that an upper-division G.E. writing class is essential and represents a glaring hole in the otherwise complete curriculum.

FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

In addition to the recommendations made in the October report, the following actions are recommended:

Make the Cultural Studies and creative writing orientations of the Writing Program explicit and consistent throughout the Program. Critical readings of literary as well as non-literary texts are consistent with the lifelong-learning and critical thinking orientations of the University's and Writing Programs Mission statements.

Substitute disciplinary for modal expertise in Outcome 3 in Skill Area A, as more consistent with the process, discovery and critical thinking orientation of the Program.

Pay senior part-time faculty to participate in mentoring less senior part-time faculty, who should also be compensated for the time and effort spent in the mentoring process. All faculty should be included in conversations about curriculum and

assessment, in order to promote buy-in on the part of all faculty as well as help each instructor understand how her class fits in the overall curriculum. Periodic norming sessions should be compensated.