

## MEMO

To: Louise Excell and Donna Dillingham-Evans  
From: The English Composition Program  
RE: Our response to the critique of our Composition Program Review  
Date: November 4, 2008

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Thank you for sharing with us the readers' responses to our program review. Thank you also for the chance to respond. First off, we'd like to say that we appreciate the reviewers' acknowledgments of our program's strengths. Second, the reviewers also commented on the following concerns, which we address:

- "No mention of Bachelor's Degree"
  - We did not mention the English bachelor's degree because we view Composition as a program that serves the entire institution, particularly its GE goals and objectives. In other words, we view the English 1010 - 2010 course sequence as something that serves all baccalaureate programs on our campus.
- "Too high secretary-faculty ratio" **and** "Secretary paid by department funds, not college"
  - We agree that this is a significant concern, and we look forward to hearing from the DSC administration as to how they will help us resolve this dilemma.
- Louise Excell wrote that "All three evaluators wanted more detailed information on our program's instructors."
  - To that end, we have created a complete list of our program's teachers (full-time and part-time), with their hire dates, types of degrees, specialties, and degrees earned. And while we did not list conference presentations in this follow-up document, we hope to do so in our larger, overall English self-study.
- "Too high FT-PT ratios"
  - By this comment, we are assuming the reviewers meant that there were too few full-time faculty per adjunct instructor. Due to funding, however, this continues to be a concern, **and one that has become even more of a concern since the time of writing the original report.** Combine enrollment growth with the limits on how many courses instructors can teach, and our pressure to hire adjuncts increases all the more.

Additionally, relatively few people in Washington County have the educational qualifications to teach at the adjunct level, which further exacerbates the disparity. Since we would not want to lower the educational requirements for adjuncts, we propose the following two solutions:

- A) Fund the hiring of more full-time English faculty.
- B) Increase adjunct pay, which may cause more qualified adjuncts to "come out of the woodwork," so to speak. This solution would also be a great way to help us retain the adjuncts we do have, as they have not received a pay raise in four years (since the fall semester of 2004).

- “Enrollment/attrition trends not identified; graduation/retention data not supplied; placement and transfer data not mentioned (all three evaluators noted this deficiency).”
  - At the time of writing the report, its primary composer (Brad Barry) mistakenly assumed this information was only required of baccalaureate-level programs. (The English 1010-2010 course sequence, after all, does not have graduates per se). We are pleased to have since learned that we have campus departments tracking this data for all programs. Louise Excell has also notified us that these campus entities will compile this data and put them in the Board of Regents’ required template.
  
- Under the category of “Assessment,” readers expressed three concerns:
  - “Built-in dilemma about quantifying outcomes. How to determine significant and moderate improvement on pre/post tests? Statistically? Use IR for test analysis.”
    - We will continue to work with IR on our analysis of future data, and we will also continue refining our ability to interpret future assessment results.
  
  - “Plans to add essay component delayed until 2009. Why?”
    - We are choosing to wait until 2009 to begin our essay layer of assessment until we have a pattern of everyone being “on board” with our multiple-choice layer of assessment. (We reason that it is better for us to do one layer of assessment well, before tackling another layer. We also don’t want to reduce morale by inundating instructors with too many assessment demands at one time.)
  
  - “Not clear if student evaluations of teaching used to improve teaching”
    - We have a new mentoring program that includes both formal and informal mentoring—including an annual self-assessment (full-timers only), peer evaluation and one-on-one consultation about improvements based on student feedback (full-timers and adjuncts). In addition, we believe that our instructors are also making improvements based on their individual readings of their evaluations from students. When patterns of concern arise in student evaluations, the Chair discusses such concerns with the full-time faculty, and the Director of Composition discusses such concerns with the adjuncts.
  
- Under the Category of “Facilities” readers expressed 4 categories of concern:
  - “IT old”
    - We are confused by this reader’s interpretation of our report’s IT section. We are very happy with and appreciative of the excellent help that IT employees give us (as we said in our original report). We are also thankful for the many improvements over recent years to our IT equipment. Again, IT equipment—and especially personnel—have been fantastic. Please refer to page 22 of our original report.
  
  - “Outdated library resources”
    - This comment also confused us, as we are very happy with the library’s excellent resources (with only one minor concern). Please refer to pages 23-24 of our original report.

- “Classroom shortage”
  - We look forward to hearing from DSC administration on how this problem can be alleviated. (Please note that Sharon Lee has also repeatedly requested help with this.) For more details, please refer to pages 22 and 40 of our original report.
  - Similarly, as of Fall 2008, our shortage of faculty and adjunct **office space has significantly worsened since the time of writing our original report**. We have two of our full-time faculty residing in buildings away from our home building, and we have twelve adjuncts crammed into an “office” located in an old closet located under a McDonald Building staircase. Again, in regard to this, we look forward to hearing from the DSC administration. (Please see page 22 of our original report.)
  
- “Maintenance a problem” *and* “Needs new facility; needs new building; old building; need a new building (all three evaluators made these comments)”
  - We look forward to hearing from administrators about this, especially in light of a recent report listing the priorities for campus physical improvements—a list on which the McDonald Building did not gain even a mention. This continues to concern us. Please refer to page 22 of our original report.
  
- Under “Specific Recommendations” readers mentioned the following:
  - “As health sciences enrollments increase, add APA format to curriculum.”
    - We have talked about this for years, and have not been able to come to a department-wide consensus. Four solutions, however, are already in place:
      - 1) Most textbooks used in our composition program have clearly written sections on both MLA and APA citation styles.
      - 2) Several composition teachers offer students the option of doing APA rather than MLA if the students know they are going into fields that use APA.
      - 3) The Writing Center offers APA guidance to all students.
      - 4) DSC’s OWL website (Online Writing Lab) has a guide to the APA style, as well as links to more complete guides for student use.
  
  - “Decrease the number of adjuncts and increase number of FT faculty”
    - Please see earlier section of this memo.
  
  - “Describe professional activities of FT faculty”
    - Please see earlier section of this memo.
  
  - “Increase secretarial support; secretaries should be paid by college, not department funds”
    - We look forward to hearing from DSC administrators on this topic. (Please see pages 3 and 4 of our original report.)

- “Add other qualitative indicators of student learning such as open-ended student survey[s], focus groups, [and] portfolios”
  - While it is a good idea to add such third, fourth, and fifth layers of assessment, we would like to focus on successfully launching our two-layer assessment plan—and doing it well over time. After we get “in the grove” of using our two-layer assessment, we can then consider whether or not to add more layers.
- “Develop more sensitive indicators of student learning, e.g. pretest-posttest for each course”
  - We are doing this. Please see sections 6 – 9 of our original report for the many indicators of our progress and our success in this area.
- “Continue to refine assessment”
  - Please see earlier section of this memo, as well as Appendix C of our original report.
- “Continue to increase the data pool as planned; perform needed research and report in next program review”
  - We agree, and plan to do so. (Again, please see Appendix C of our original report.)
- “Develop a formal plan for reviewing library holdings involving librarian and faculty”
  - It seems that the overall DSC program-review process requires this, and we are happy to continue fulfilling this criterion as called for by the overall DSC expectations. In short, as the program-review cycle dictates, we will continue to integrate reviews of library holdings into our already-required program assessments. It behooves us and our students to continue doing so—and the current expectation seems to be enough.
 

We come to this conclusion, in part, because of the excellent liaison system that the library has created. We know that, as concerns arise about holdings, we can always communicate with our library liaison. We have had much success with this in the past.
- “Request funding for subject-specific encyclopedias”
  - We look forward to hearing from DSC administration on this issue, as it was the one and only concern about library holdings (i.e. the need for more up-to-date print versions of subject-specific encyclopedias). Please see pages 23-24 of our original report.

**Our Action Plan:**

Please refer to the above comments, as well as to pages 34 and 36-40 of our original report.

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If you have any questions or concerns about this response, please feel free to contact us.

We look forward to hearing from you.