To: Virginia Sapiro, Dean College of Arts & Sciences, Boston University
From: Diane Belcher, Susan Blau, Cheryl Glenn, Joseph Harris, and Robert Volk, Review
             Committee
Re: **Review of Boston University's Writing Program**
Date: November 8, 2013

The opinion of the Review Committee is strongly positive. We have worked to capture the spirit of each of the five categories of concern in the self-study and list possibilities and recommendations for moving the Writing Program forward. Naturally, there is some overlap among the categories in terms of our recommendations, particularly those having to do (1) with the ever-growing international-student population and (2) with the administrative structure of the Writing Program. To that end, we recommend the addition of two Associate Director positions and one administrative assistant position.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

The curriculum of the Writing Program centers on the two-course, first-year writing sequence, WR 100/WR 150. The design of these courses reflects current best practices in writing pedagogy through their emphasis on academic writing, process, revision, research, and argument. The many sections of both courses are all based on a common template that asks students to draft and revise three mid-length essays of increasing complexity and to construct a portfolio of their work for the semester. Instructors diversify this fairly uniform structure by choosing a theme and set of readings, based on their scholarly expertise, as the particular focus of work in their section. The courses are thus consistent across sections while offering undergraduates and their teachers a diverse range of topics about which to read and write.

The faculty we spoke with all seemed genuinely invested in the courses they were teaching, and the students we spoke with all praised the work they did as challenging and interesting. The one criticism we heard is that some courses could at times seem more "topic-centered" than "writing-centered," but the focus of the program is clearly on using the materials of a discipline to teach the distinctive moves of academic writing.

Many international students are placed into a series of preparatory, credit-bearing courses, WR 97/WR 98, before taking WR 100/WR 150. These courses provide an intense focus on the conventions of academic English prose for those students who require such. They seem quite successful.

The intense focus of WR 100/WR 150 on academic writing may somewhat limit its ability to teach students to write as part of their "future personal, professional, and civic lives," as stated in the program mission. However, we also saw many assignments that asked students to produce texts other than conventional academic arguments, and the program seems to actively encourage its more senior faculty in such teaching experiments. We hope that it will continue this interest in fostering a rhetorical nimbleness and awareness of different writing genres in the disciplines and beyond.

Our recommendations are thus:

1. The focus of WR 100/WR 150 on academic argument serves BU students well. The program should continue in this direction, while encouraging senior faculty somewhat more flexibility in the types and processes of writing (genres, formats, lengths, media of delivery) they assign.

2. The portfolio seems a useful exercise in metacognition for students and to provide teachers with an important moment to reflect on their work. The program does not need to review portfolios every year. A focused review of randomly selected portfolios every second or third year should provide it with an accurate, ongoing measure of the actual work that students are doing in WR 100/WR 150.

3. The element conspicuously missing in the present curriculum is attention to digital or multimodal writing, which is likely to become necessarily important in students' professional lives.

4. The question of delaying WR 150 to the sophomore year was raised several times. This could be a good idea, but there does not seem an overwhelming case for or against doing so. This issue could be discussed further.

5. As a way of encouraging writing in the disciplines, we support the idea of encouraging departments to put forward courses as "Writing 150 equivalents." Once such courses are approved, there should be a simple and clear way to cross-list them with WR 150.

6. As BU recruits increasing numbers of international students, all teachers of writing will need to be sensitive to the needs of second-language learners, whether they are teaching courses marked as ESL or not. We recommend that the graduate course in teaching writing, EN 698, include a significant section on teaching multilingual learners, and that a second day be added to the annual faculty orientation in August to discuss such issues.

7. The program might revisit the possibility of using TOEFL test scores to place international students into WR 97/WR 98. This test now offers a much more accurate measure of writing skills than it did a few years ago.

Writing Center: Student Academic Services and Support

The CAS Writing Center is an important resource for the CAS Writing Program. By all accounts, the tutors work intensively with students enrolled in all of the WR courses and provide particular support for the growing number of international students who constitute a "major constituency" of the Center. We applaud this effort and note that few other resources exist across the University that are geared to help international students make the transition to American culture and master spoken and written English.

As can be expected, the Writing Center faces a number of challenges if it is going to continue to

be a major support of the CAS Writing Program. Chief among the challenges is the pressing need for more resources. We were impressed by the knowledge, dedication, and hard work of the co-coordinators, but it is clear that they need more resources—particularly more release time—to accomplish their mission. With only one release course each, the co-coordinators oversee the daily running of the Center—work that includes hiring, training, and supervising the 29 graduate and undergraduate tutors. The Writing Center needs a full-time director to provide additional and important leadership in research, assessment, curricular and professional development.

In addition, more resources, both in time and money, would allow the CAS Writing Center to participate more fully in the regional, national, and international writing center organizations. We would like to see the writing center faculty—as well as tutors— be able to attend the professional conferences, present workshops, do research, and publish in the peer-reviewed Writing Center journals.

We were pleased to learn about the tutor-training course, WR598, Tutoring in ESL, which we believe is an essential part of the education and training of the writing center tutors. And, we were equally pleased to meet the undergraduate and graduate student tutors, who were clearly committed to their work and knowledgeable about tutoring pedagogy and philosophy.

We hope the CAS Writing Center continues to grow—expanding its mission and outreach, contributing to the scholarship in the writing center field, and supporting all the student writers in the CAS Writing Program.

To meet these goals, we offer these four recommendations:

1. Hire a full-time Director with a background in the writing center field

2. Hire a dedicated staff assistant to handle the daily administrative work of running an active writing center

3. Expand the mission of the Writing Center to become even more significantly the "center" of writing in the college: perhaps offering workshops on specific academic writing skills, hosting student and faculty readings, and attracting accomplished student writers as well as " students deemed by their instructors likely to benefit from this additional support."

4. Organize a consortium of Writing Center Directors across the university to share resources and collaborate on writing center research

Faculty

With offices for everyone teaching in the Writing Program, the new building serves to foster a sense of collegiality, collaboration, and good will across the faculty. The faculty appears to be committed to their work, happy with their positions, and intellectually stimulated. The topic-based writing program (with its creative and flexible features) remains key to their overall

satisfaction. Over a two-day period, we heard no substantive complaints, rather much commendation for the Writing Program and for the leadership (and advocacy) of Joe Bizup.

Lecturers and graduate writing fellows alike expressed appreciation for the curriculum and interest in expanding that curriculum in terms of themes (linked courses across the disciplines), writing assignments (genres, formats), and collaborations of every kind. They also appreciate the professional support (from orientation to offices) at the same time that they wrestle with the university-wide expectation that they should be able to produce students who write "correct English." By all indications, this faculty consciously balances the teaching of "correctness" with the teaching of style, argument, evidence, and research.

This hard-working faculty (all of whom would like smaller classes and more scheduling flexibility) remains committed to the mission of the writing program at the same time that its members engage in professional development and programmatic service. The borders between these two categories of engagement tend to blur, with faculty unsure of what extra-classroom obligations "count" toward which category and how participation in either of these categories counts toward anything else, particularly promotion and merit raises. At present, the engagements range from attending lectures and workshops to reading portfolios and job applications.

The issues the faculty consistently considered and discussed were curricular as well as professional:

- Where in the curriculum might WR 150 best serve the students (second semester? second year?)?
- How might WR150 be enriched to differ even more sharply from WR 100?
- How might they invigorate their writing classes by coordinating with faculty in other disciplines?
- How might the Writing Program establish a singular university-wide identity at the same time that it maintains a commitment to theme-based courses?
- How might they more easily share pedagogical materials and ideas?
- How might they develop more confidence and expertise in teaching international students?
- How might faculty best position themselves for promotion?

The recommendations of the review committee are as follows:

1. In terms of faculty engagement, the Writing Program administration could more clearly distinguish between professional development and programmatic service, with an emphasis on the importance ongoing professional development (both disciplinary/topical and rhet-comp).

2. Service and professional development should be presented as opportunities for advancement on both the lecturer ladder and pay scale. Such opportunities should be clarified and quantified at the same time that the means for promotion are clearly articulated and rendered transparent.

3. Accompanying the service and professional development obligations on the part of the faculty could be a merit-based system of support that includes funding (for attending professional meetings, conducting research, or entering a poetry contest, for example) to course releases for heavy service.

4. The administration should initiate a larger pay differential between MAs and PhDs, a means by which to offer more nationally competitive salaries, to continue to upgrade the program, and to get the best candidates. A pay raise for all current lecturers would enhance the national profile of the Writing Program as well as the retention of talented lecturers.

5. Regular faculty meetings (with agendas) and Town Hall meetings (without agendas) would provide opportunities for faculty to come together to ask questions about assessment, promotion, cross-listings, hiring, and so on.

6. A mentoring system, pairing new and experienced lecturers, could easily be established for the benefit of new instructors as well as the Writing Program.

7. An extended orientation and/or series of regular practica would provide a professional-development platform for discussing such topics as
   a. optimal conditions for developing the writing of international students,
   b. best practices in writing programs,
   c. respected composition theories and pedagogical practices,
   d. rhetorical concepts,
   e. the place of grammar in writing instruction,
   f. how best to handle the paper load,
   g. conducting peer-review workshops,
   h. determining a hierarchy of concerns in responding to and grading student writing,
   i. developing a theme-based course (including course description, syllabus, and writing assignments),
   j. and scholarship in rhetoric and writing.

8. Hiring two Associate Directors (PhDs with expertise in rhetoric and writing studies) would enhance the reputation and reach of the writing program as well as reduce the programmatic service expectations/obligations for the lecturers. Such hires would also alleviate the great demands on the energy and expertise of Bizup, freeing him up to develop various lines of professional interest.

   a. A specialist in writing-in-the-disciplines (WID), writing-intensive courses (WIC), or writing-across-the-disciplines (WAC) could extend relationships across the faculties (Writing Advisory Board), helping to seed WR150-equivalent courses as well as intellectual/pedagogical/curricular partnerships. Such a specialist could also lead the assessment initiative (portfolio or otherwise).

    b. A specialist in writing centers (WC) could expand the training and supervision of writing tutors to include attention to translingual writers/international students and situate the Writing Center more firmly in the professional arena.

    c. Both hires could participate in hiring committees and merit-review committees (with the merit-review committee becoming the responsibility of administrators). Both hires could also contribute to an enriched orientation program for new instructors, whether lecturers or graduate students.

9. The Writing Program might consider ways to leverage the resource that is WPnet. Faculty desire a richer, more robust online resource that includes Writing Program policies, curriculum, and handbook; strong examples of syllabi; good assignments; instructive handouts (how best to attribute, cite, and document sources, for instance); and clearly explained classroom practices. The WPnet could also include youtube or podcast examples of microteaching, of specific ways to teach the first assignment, a rhetorical concept, a genre, or the assembly of a portfolio.

10. Given the abiding interest of graduate students from across the College, the Writing Program might formalize the requirements for a Certificate for Teaching Writing.

Administration and Governance

Despite being overburdened and stretched, Joe Bizup, is doing an excellent job as Director of the Writing Program. He is assisted by two equally overburdened Associate Directors and three administrative support staff persons. The Committee believes that more administrative support is necessary to achieve the goals of the Program and to allow the Director to focus on continued development of the Program.

As such, the Committee makes the following staffing recommendations:

1. The Program should add an Associate Director for Writing in the Disciplines. The duties of this individual would include:
    a. Managing the portfolio assessment process
    b. Acting as liaison the Faculty Advisory Board
    c. Working with the Writing Advisory Board to review proposals to evaluate WR 150 equivalents outside of the Writing Program

2. The Program should add an Associate Director for the Writing Center. This individual should have writing center experience. The duties of this individual would include:
    a. Administering the Writing Center
    b. Supervising the Writing Tutors
    c. Developing workshops and other training opportunities for tutors and Writing Program faculty
    d. Adding to the scholarship in the Writing Center field

3. The Program should add a dedicated administrative assistant to support the Writing Center

4. The Program should retain the existing two Associate Director positions and three administrative support staff positions.

With the addition of the above positions, the Committee makes the following recommendations regarding the governance and administration of the Writing Program:

1. The role of the Faculty Advisory Board should include advocating for and evaluating potential WR 150 equivalents proposed by colleges and schools outside of the Writing Program. Acting with the Associate Director for Writing in the Disciplines, the Board should have the authority to approve WR 150 equivalents.
2. Senior and Master Lecturers should no longer be involved in evaluating the other Senior and Master Lecturers for merit pay raises. Instead, the Associate Directors, in consultation with the Director, should make these decisions.

Outreach

Joe Bizup appears to be strongly committed to a consultancy model of outreach for the Writing Program. We heard from several faculty in the disciplines that he has reached out to about some highly productive collaboration resulting in the development of discipline-specific writing assignments and instruction tailored to the needs a specific departments and professions. Especially noteworthy is the work done with Professor Binyomin Abrams, in chemistry, who spoke of his collaboration with the WP as "changing his life." Dr. Abrams has implemented genre-appropriate, domain-specific writing tasks in his classes designed for transfer and growth, i.e., for his students both as novice academic writers and future professionals. Other faculty expressed interest in working with Joe to create WR 150-equivalent courses in their own departments. Given the size of CAS, however, and Joe's other responsibilities as WP Director, there are obvious limits to the amount of academic community outreach and collaboration Joe or his current staff can do to further encourage and assist in such work, which currently appears to be done on a mainly ad hoc basis.

CAS faculty find that some students who have completed WR 100/150 course work continue to have global and local writing needs that faculty feel are difficult for them to adequately address on their own. Students and faculty will benefit from additional support.

Also conspicuous is the felt need among CAS faculty for support in meeting the academic literacy needs of an increasing number of international students, who often face steep hurdles in adapting to the linguistic and culture-specific demands of being a college student in American academia. For example, international students may sometimes have difficulty graspingWestern notions of intellectual property. ESL WP courses, that is, WR 97, 98, 100, are in place to meet such students' needs, as well as the research-oriented WR 150 course. Second language acquisition and academic socialization however are gradual processes that may take more than several semesters, especially given that literacy expectations become more demanding for

students as they progress in their academic programs. While well trained and dedicated WP instructors and Writing Center tutors are in place to help international students, clearly a growing need for support beyond first-year writing exists.

The Review Committee recommends the following:

1. Hire an additional WP associate director whose expertise and charge is in writing in the disciplines. This person could explore the discipline-specific writing needs of CAS students and offer encouragement and support for CAS faculty who wish to provide more scaffolded writing assignments and more effective writing feedback that will be supportive of both monolingual and multilingual students.

2. Expand the Writing Center to enable it to offer writing support to students who are beyond WR 150 and continue to feel the need for guidance as writers. All tutors in the Writing Center should also be trained to assist the growing number of multilingual writers at BU.

3. Consider providing additional support for international students beyond what the WP and Writing Center can reasonably be expected to provide to increasing numbers of such students, whose needs go beyond the context of specific writing assignments. Some universities have established dedicated resource centers, or learning support centers, for international students (undergraduate and graduate), with tutoring in all linguistic modalities, i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing, study space, additional advising, and so on. CAS could also consider partnering with CELOP to develop summer bridge programs for new international students to prepare them for the oral and written communication expectations and cultural adaptation they will face as full-time students at BU.