Minutes of Core Review Committee

The Core Review Committee met January 31, 2006 in Weckesser Conference Room. In attendance: committee members Brian Whitman, chair; Philip Simon, Art Kibbe, Andrew Miller, Marianne Rexer, Gina Morrison, Amanda McMann, and Diane Wenger; ex officio members Amy Patton, Ellen Flint, and Susan Hritzak; and guest Agnes Cardoni, Coordinator of Writing.

Dr. Whitman called the meeting to order at 11:02 a.m.; the group welcomed a new member, student representative Amanda McMann.

On motion of Art Kibbe, seconded by Marianne Rexer, the committee approved the minutes of December 18, 2005.

Dr. Whitman reported that the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) proposal has been signed by all the department chairpersons; the biology department signed, but has not approved. Dr. Whitman will announce the progress on WAC at the next faculty meeting and acknowledge the work of the old Core Review Committee. At that time he will also invite faculty members to send any concerns about WAC to Curriculum Committee Chairperson Jeff Alves (copy to Whitman). The proposal is on the agenda for the next Curriculum Committee.

Dr. Wenger shared the concerns of the Humanities Department about the WAC proposal (no business plan, no supporting documentation, vague proposal with no mention of assessment, and no meaningful discussion of relationship between WAC and undergraduate experience); she indicated that most department members supported the concept of WAC, but some expressed reservations about the proposal’s format and language.

Dr. Cardoni offered to share the Holstein (writing consultant) report with the committee to reiterate the importance/rationale for switching from Writing Intensive courses to the WAC model. Dr. Flint offered to send the report to all committee members.

Dr. Kibbe, who discussed the WAC proposal with the biology department, commented that he believes their reluctance to approve it may stem from a lack of understanding of the purpose of WAC along with concerns about switching over to the new program (i.e., fear of delaying students’ graduation).

A general discussion followed in which the committee reiterated the need to switch to WAC to meet Middle States requirements, follow the recommendations of the consultant, and address the fact the our students are not learning to write under the present system. As to the lack of a business plan, the committee noted that Academic Planning Committee did not require one because there was no development money involved, but if Curriculum Committee wants one, we will do it.

A lengthy discussion ensued about the need to have departments design their own writing programs --the precise “fit”--because those faculty know best what their majors need; ENG 101 cannot prepare students to write in their separate disciplines. Professor Morrison emphasized
that not every professor will have to teach writing; Dr. Kibbe noted that each department bears the responsibility to be sure students can write when they graduate.

Dr. Cardoni explained her role as coordinator of writing, citing her extensive experience in this area. She distributed two documents (“Principles of Good Writing” and “Writing Across the Curriculum: Some Terms and Online Resources”).

Dr. Whitman commented on the response to WAC from department chairs; some people expressed concern about the level of student preparedness; i.e., what can we expect them to know after taking ENG 101? As the committee reviewed the goals identified by the previous Core Review Committee, there was agreement that the outcomes for skill requirement #4 (written communication) are ambitious; in fact, they seem more like end goals for graduating students than goals for students who have completed ENG 101. Dr. Cardoni remarked that the English department is revamping ENG 101 and that it would be well to consult with the department chairperson, Dr. Larry Kuhar, about the proposed changes; the department already has identified its desired endpoint competencies for students completing ENG 101. Dr. Whitman emphasized that our committee, working with the English faculty and the Assessment Committee, needs to identify reasonable outcomes/skills for 101. Professor Simon noted that basic writing (spelling, grammar) is not taught at the high school level, and we should want this as an outcome of ENG 101. Professor Morrison pointed out that the six principles of good writing distributed by Dr. Cardoni might serve as our goals.

There was some discussion about the possibility of recommending a return to ENG 101 and ENG 102. Dr. Cardoni noted the scheduling problem—as demonstrated by the lack of advisor cooperation in allowing students in the stretch program to take ENG101 and 120 in sequence. Dr. Rexer cautioned against adding the 102 because it may place the burden on English faculty to teach writing and allow departments to feel they may opt out.

Dr. Miller asked about how writing should be incorporated in FYF101; it appears this is already a common goal, but there is no policing of the present requirement.

Reacting to the concerns about the WAC proposal itself, Dr. Flint commented that there is no mention of assessment element in the proposal to enable departments to set their own goals.

In regards to assessment, Dr. Flint further informed the committee that there is an urgent need to gather assessment data, because the Board of Trustees expects to receive an assessment of the core at its June meeting. (Dr. Barbara Loftus may have more knowledge of the Board’s expectations; Dr. Whitman will pursue this issue with Dr. Loftus.)

Dr. Kibbe reiterated that the faculty needs to know the level it can expect students to reach upon completing ENG 101---that course is not responsible for inculcating all writing skills, but it is important for us to know what we can expect students to know when they finish it.

Amanda McMann echoed this sentiment. She pointed out that there is no challenge in the present system—students can “fake it.” She asked, “What constitutes a diploma?” That is, we should not allow students to “just get by”; this demeans those students who are working hard.
She agreed that ENG 101 cannot do it all; writing needs to be a process, and grammar is only a small chunk (i.e., professors should not worry about being editors of student writing, but rather should look for evidence that students are using their minds and applying the principles of their discipline.)

Dr. Whitman proposed a number of items that might be addressed in the next meeting— we will need to make choices about what we want for competencies, communicate what we want from WAC, and put together a global skills list.

Professor Simon suggested that we let everyone on campus know that we are under pressure from the administration to development an assessment model. The Assessment Committee has noted there are a number of standard tests available; these may not be ideal, but together we need to come up with an assessment, not just of ENG 101, but other courses.

Dr. Kibbe asked if it is time to move on to the OP courses; the consensus of the committee was that we should wait to see what problems we encounter with WAC. Dr. Whitman suggested that, since we may have to respond to the Curriculum Committee on WAC, we come up with some specific goals for ENG 101 and then we can do the same for the OPO courses.

Dr. Rexer reminded the group that we need to determine how we are going to receive and process WAC proposals as they come in (before we send them on to Curriculum).

The committee set this proposed agenda for the next meeting, February 9:

1) Invite Dr. Larry Kuhar to attend to discuss ENG 101
2) Adopt goals for endpoint writing competencies.

The meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Wenger