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To Dean Cruz:

The following is my report of my observations and assessment of the WAC Program and WAC Lab during my visit to Loyola University New Orleans on March 8, 2012.

First, allow me to say that it was a tremendous pleasure and honor to visit with you, Robert, Nancy, Mary, the faculty, the tutors, and the administrators. Loyola NO is a gorgeous campus that is only surpassed by the dedication of its faculty and administration, in particular Robert Bell, Nancy Rowe, and Mary Waguesback.

Second, my findings and recommendations are merely ways in which to strengthen and keep alive the WAC Program and WAC Lab. Robert, Nancy, and Mary have created such an energetic, dynamic, and supportive program and lab, and it would only benefit the university to continue to support and promote the three aforementioned faculty/ staff and the program.

Finally, please read my report and feel free to email me or call with any questions, comments, or concerns you may have. Also, please feel free to email or call if you need any clarification. Thank you all, once again, for the opportunity to come visit your lovely campus and meet so many of the wonderful people employed there.

Respectfully,

Gwendolyn Hale
Spring 2012 WAC Program and WAC Lab Assessment Report

Loyola New Orleans

Date of Visit: March 8, 2012

Outside Assessment Faculty: Dr. Gwendolyn N. Hale, Ph.D

Submitted on March 20, 2012
Observations and Suggestions

On March 8, 2012, I was granted the opportunity to meet with Loyola University New Orleans (NO) faculty, staff, and students to assess, as an outside reviewer, the success and efficacy of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program and the Writing Center (WAC Lab). During this time, I was given the opportunity to meet with Robert Bell, WAC Director; Nancy Rowe, Assistant Director of WAC; and Mary Waguespack, Faculty Writing Consultant.

One of the first observations I made about the WAC staff is their profound and honest enthusiasm for what they do. Robert’s, Nancy’s, and Mary’s support of faculty, staff, students, and one another is genuine and unquestionable. For this, Loyola NO is truly fortunate to have such a cohesive and supportive team of professionals assembled to take on the daunting task of WAC. Furthermore, the WAC team of Robert, Nancy, and Mary is truly well-versed, well-educated, and well-prepared to continue to create a foundation for the university’s WAC program. The aforementioned characteristics were evidenced numerous times throughout the day when I spoke with administrators, faculty, staff, and students. The most telling conversation I had was with the WAC tutors who were so enthusiastic about the work they do with WAC. While many, if not all, of the students were hired based on their financial aid status of work study, the WAC team had managed to attract some of the best and brightest as well as help to train and educate those who were less prepared for such a job. The tutors’ preparedness is a true reflection of the time- and labor-intensive work the WAC team undertakes. Moreover, their preparedness speaks volumes about the infinite patience the WAC team embodies. This level of patience was also mentioned by Assistant Dean Hunt who asserted she appreciated the seemingly infinite patience exhibited by the WAC team.
One area of concern and suggestion regarding the means through which tutors are hired is to provide more funding so that Robert, Nancy, and Mary can begin to hand pick tutors rather than having to hire ones they receive through financial aid and hope they work out. While no one will doubt that Robert, Nancy, and Mary have done an amazing job with the tutors they have received based on their financial aid status, one can only assume then that they would create an even better and more qualified group of tutors were they given the funding to pick tutors from a competitive pool of applicants. While I understand funding is always a sensitive issue, one also has to consider that students’ ability to write and write well reflects on the university’s effectiveness even after that student has graduated and moved on. Loyola NO needs to have the ultimate goal that whatever else its students do well, add to it that its students are effective and strong writers. This should be a selling point for the university, and one way to begin toward that claim is to hire prepared and qualified tutors.

Yet another area of strength the WAC program and Writing Center have is their improvement of the WAC website. Many faculty had no idea of the resources this site houses. One of the previous recommendations made five years ago was for the WAC program to improve or expound upon its website and digital resources. They have made clear strides in this arena, and it is my understanding that they will continue to grow the website and create new and engaging resources for the site. This will be another feather in the cap of the WAC program should they continue to develop this tremendous resource as it is one small way to assist in the cohesion of the WAC program in terms of the faculty and administration becoming not only advocates for the WAC program but also active participants. A recommendation for this arena to further strengthen an already strong aspect of the WAC program is to more aggressively pursue tech fee funds as suggested by Provost Kvet in our morning meeting with him. The WAC team
might consider purchasing a few ipads or laptops in order to be more mobile to give presentations in classrooms. Moreover, the WAC team may consider purchasing a video camera and tripod in order to create more online presentations and workshops for students and faculty to access. This would also be another way to assess their work and efficacy in the WAC program by filming focus groups or roundtable discussions among faculty and students to find out what the WAC does well and its areas of improvement. The tech fee could also be utilized to purchase scheduling software so that students could call and make appointments or set up appointments themselves online. This might help to alleviate the congestion outside and inside of the WAC lab. Students will know when their appointment is and when they should be there. Finally, this tech fee funding could be used to purchase site licenses for Blackboard Live, (formerly Elluminate Live) which is an online service where tutors and students can meet in a chat room, speak to one another via headset and microphone, and have a synchronous tutoring session in which both can view the student’s uploaded essay. This would certainly help with tutoring non-traditional or online learners, as well as the online Nursing program, who may not be able to make it to campus every day. Still, such a purchase and investment as the synchronous online tutoring component will require an investment of funds and qualified personnel on the part of the university administration.

Aside from the absolutely amazing staff of the WAC team, I was also impressed by what the WAC team had created with such a small space. I understand that space is always at a premium at most any university across the country, but I was truly pleased to hear that the WAC program would be receiving more space in at least 3-4 years when Bobet Hall is vacated by those moving to the newly-reno

vated Jesuit Center. It is also my hopes that this is not lip service or false promise for more space. The WAC program truly needs more physical space in order to
grow and accommodate students. One faculty member stated it best when he asserted, “In a way, I am sort of glad not everyone on campus is fully aware of what WAC does because if they did, the WAC would become far busier than it is capable of handling.” From my understanding, it is nearly that way now. Another faculty member stated that she has walked by the WAC lab before and it looked like a club from the outside. The interior was packed with students and tutors, and other students were lined up outside waiting to be seen by a tutor. Some of the tutors even expressed concern that sometimes the Writing Center (WAC Lab) gets so busy it is difficult to hear the person with whom they are working. This is certainly a concern. A temporary solution for this problem would be to provide a nearby office or classroom for the WAC lab to utilize until the Jesuit Center is complete and the WAC program can hopefully take over at least the entire first floor of Bobet Hall. Another concern I have with the expansion of the WAC program is to try, for the sake of continuity, familiarity, and centrality, to keep the WAC program in Bobet Hall on the first floor. While this may seem like a mundane detail to many, for Writing Centers and WAC programs to be successful, they must adhere to the real estate mantra of location, location, location. As WAC implies, this program and center should be the center of the campus academic community. This is one of the few programs in which all other disciplines can converge and achieve some commonality. This is imperative for students to understand so that they see the relationship between all of their classes. This is the university’s vehicle by which to move the academics forward and create cohesion among all the disciplines. The first step in this movement is the physical location of the WAC program and Writing Center.

One way to get more faculty to buy into the WAC program is to institute a Writing Intensive (WI) course requirement to graduate. This would obviously take a little time to implement after planning, but perhaps starting the year of 20xx, incoming Freshmen will be
required to take, for example, two WI courses. These courses can be in their majors or as core requirements as long as they are labeled Writing Intensive by the faculty of record. The WAC program, along with its committee, would decide on the requirements for a course to be considered WI. For example, many universities assert that for a course to be considered WI, it must require students to write x number of pages with at least a certain percentage being revised and edited with constructive feedback from the instructor. These page numbers can also include informal writing, or writing to learn. (For a list of universities’ WI requirements, please email me, and I am happy to forward what I have come up with in my research. The average, however, is about 15 pages of assessed or graded writing over the course of the semester). With such programs implemented along with what Loyola NO already does well, Loyola NO could become known as a university where writing matters a great deal and graduates KNOW how to write and communicate well.

Next, no one will ever question the WAC staff’s ability to keep detailed records of the visits, learning outcomes, and so forth. They currently do an amazing job. One of the areas of suggestion from an outsider’s perspective is to hire an administrative assistant for the WAC lab. This administrative assistant would serve a variety of purposes. The first is to make appointments for students. As previously stated, this might assist in alleviating the congestion and noise outside of the WAC lab as students wait to be seen by tutors. By offering preference to the students who have appointments and then taking walk-ins when time is available, the tutors can then not feel as stressed or pushed to hurry the sessions along. The next purpose for this administrative assistant is merely to greet those who walk in. This may seem like a small, innocuous detail, but when it comes to students who are already anxious about writing, to not be acknowledged may give some already-hesitant students just the push they need to turn around
and walk away without seeking assistance. Finally, this administrative assistant, along with other duties as assigned by his/her supervisor, would enter in data from tutoring reports. One item of concern I found in my conversations with the tutors is that they essentially write the report from the tutoring session twice and, depending on whether or not they are busy, often stay over to enter in information into the computer program from their tutoring session. I already spoke with Nancy and Mary regarding this. One way to eliminate the step or typing up the report twice is to use two-part carbon paper for the tutoring forms. Instead of making copies of the reports to send to faculty, they can now rip off the top copy, fold and send through campus mail and place the yellow copy on file for the administrative assistant to enter in the info for assessment data. Furthermore, faculty all agreed, in my meeting with them, they all really appreciated the paper forms they received as opposed to emails. Often, their email inboxes often become full or crowded, and they might miss some of the tutoring reports. However, even though it is not the most environmentally friendly way, they do appreciate the paper copies.

Yet another area of concern from an outsider’s perspective is Mary’s Waguesback’s workload. I understand she is a hard worker regardless of the expectations placed on her. However, she currently teaches three courses in English. Next, she is in the WAC lab, from my understanding, at least 16-20 hours a week on top of the courses she teaches. While I gathered from my conversations with Mary and others that she loves her job and would be passionate about it no matter, I also think that giving Mary at least a two course release time would be beneficial to not only the WAC lab but also to her students in the classroom. It boggles the mind that one could continue to grad that many papers and work in the WAC lab that number of hours and maintain the passion, enthusiasm, and efficiency that she does. I would like to suggest either
a two course release for Mary or perhaps offer her a pay raise as recognition for the hard work she takes on.

Along these same lines, I would also like to suggest that Nancy and Robert, especially, be given some sort of elevated titles so that faculty may take them more seriously. I would even recommend placing Robert and Nancy on the tenure-track line if that were something they would like to pursue. Often, faculty do not have the same respect for administrative faculty as they do for tenured and tenure-track faculty. While Robert and Nancy do as much or more as a tenured/tenure track faculty, the devil is truly in the details. By giving them each a tenure track line or elevated titles, faculty will perceive their work and their objectives differently. Moreover, if asked to provide information or participate in some program, faculty often do not do as instructed because Robert and Nancy do not have titles to which faculty respond.

“Extraordinary” faculty, moreover, is a title that many tenure-track and tenured faculty snickered at when I asked them about Robert and Nancy as well as others who hold this title. It was explained to me in the following way: “We know what ‘extraordinary’ really means.” I gathered from the context that the title was laughable and not one that commanded respect. Ultimately, for the WAC program to be successful, the administration must act in a way that demonstrates to faculty that they respect Robert and Nancy—one way to do this is by extending to them an elevated title or tenure-track lines.

Within this same area of concern is that administration show support for the WAC program. The administrators with whom I was allowed to speak acknowledged that WAC is a very important institution-wide component; they see the value in the WAC program. However, a few administrators admitted to not speaking about or placing enough emphasis on the WAC program. I was told that perhaps “it has become such a part of the fabric of the university that
"[they] may not highlight it as much as [they] should.” Writing needs to become one of the university’s major pillars of learning, and administrators—from the president to the department chairs—need to be discussing how important WAC is. Furthermore, WAC needs to be explained by administrators as not just the WAC programs’ concern but EVERYONE’s concern. Further, since at least 50% of the faculty have been newly hired since Hurricane Katrina, administrators should not take for granted that faculty know about WAC and so forth. Moreover, with the implementation of the new core curriculum, the time is perfect to renew the university’s commitment to writing across the curriculum.

While all the WAC program members seem to work wonderfully together, there seems to be a small gap in the loop with composition and assessment. For example, the WAC and the First Year Seminar Director seem to work very well together. They keep one another abreast of what is going on and how they may assist one another in their respective projects to ultimately help the students succeed. However, there was very little mention of a composition director and how he/she fits into all of this. All three of these areas lay the foundation for the students’ success during their matriculation at Loyola NO; still, without collaboration and communication among these three areas, true success and the closing of the assessment and education loop cannot occur. I would recommend more collaboration and communication among the WAC, the First Year Seminar, and the Composition program (if there is one) occurs.

Finally, since the WAC program is underfunded financially, I would like to propose or suggest putting together a Loyola NO Writing Across the Curriculum Guide. I have already discussed this with Robert Bell and have given him a copy of a version I did for another university. This guide offers the opportunity to generate a modest revenue to fund tutors, travel, professional development, or other areas the WAC director sees fit.
Summary

Loyola NO’s WAC program is already doing amazing things in practice and in pedagogy. Robert Bell is an incredible and dynamic leader who is respected by all with whom I was able to speak. He is adored by the tutors and faculty alike. Robert has carved out a unique and effective WAC program for Loyola NO. The WAC program and WAC lab are currently at a crossroads. It is time for the university to not only better fund the program and lab but also lend credibility to both by acknowledging them frequently and placing emphasis on writing across the disciplines. Without such funding and credibility, the WAC program and lab stand the chance of fading into the background or becoming less consistent in their helpfulness because of a lack of funding for preparation and a lack of tutors to assist all who need help. If this occurs, faculty, staff, and students will lose faith in the abilities of the WAC program and lab. If such a loss of faith occurs, it will be a gross injustice to the students and faculty of Loyola NO. Robert, Nancy, Mary, and the tutors work very hard to make the WAC program and lab serve the needs of the university’s population. Therefore, in order to assist the WAC program and lab to continue to thrive and be successful, I would suggest the following:

- More funding (allow for professional development, hiring of tutors not restricted to work study students)
- More administrative support (vocal and through random visits to the WAC lab to see how things are going; student tutors respond positively to this as it shows the work they do matters)
- Another course release for Mary Waguesback or an increase in pay
- Aggressively use and seek our tech funds. Purchase Blackboard Live to assist students in an online capacity.
• “Extraordinary” faculty title changed or eliminated.
• Titles or tenure-track lines for Nancy Rowe and Robert Bell to lend credibility to the WAC program and lab when Nancy and Robert approach the faculty about taking on tasks.
• Loyola NO Writing Across the Curriculum Guide to generate revenue
• Writing Intensive course requirements at Loyola NO
• More space for the WAC program and lab
• Administrative Assistant for WAC lab/ WAC program
• More collaboration and communication among WAC, First Year Seminar director, and Composition Director.
• Two-part carbon tutoring reports to eliminate redundancy
• Create a strategic plan for the WAC program and WAC lab if it does not already exist. This is where WAC could list 2-3 long-term goals. It would also be able to map out where it sees itself going and what it is becoming in the long term. What does WAC want to see at the end of the road as it develops? This is a way for WAC and the administration to begin to merge their ideas and aspirations for the WAC program. By articulating the ideas, WAC can see where its vision intersects with the administration’s.

Ultimately, I was so profoundly impressed by the WAC program and lab. Robert, Nancy, and Mary are truly exceptional educators and humans who care wholeheartedly about students learning and being successful. They are truly team players who value collaboration. I offer the aforementioned suggestions in an effort to assist Robert, Nancy, Mary and whoever else comes
on board with the WAC program to continue to grow, improve, and assist. With a growing and ever-diverse student population, the demands on the WAC program and lab will only continue to increase. My only hope is the university values the contributions of the WAC program enough to assist in making these suggestions a reality.