Introduction

I must begin this report with a personal “thank you” to all administrators, faculty, staff, and students I met during my visit on March 7 and 8, 2012. It was a pleasure to be a part of your five-year review and I hope my observations and suggestions help make your already strong program a better one.

What is Working Well in Loyola’s Writing Across the Curriculum?

- WAC Administration

After twenty-five years of existence, the WAC program is clearly a strong one. One need only observe the professional camaraderie amongst the Director, Assistant Director, and Faculty Writing Consultant. This spirit of goodwill and commitment to writing excellence on the campus of Loyola University has a “trickle down” effect to student tutors, student writers, and the faculty who interact with WAC on a regular basis.

- WAC Tutors

In meeting with a group of Loyola tutors, there was palpable energy in the room. Student tutors are committed not only to the important work they do assisting peers in the Writing Center, but they also have a commitment to their community of tutors. These students are learning how to create a positive and productive professional work
environment. One tutor said, “I used to tutor at another school and I would be afraid to go ask the director a question. That’s not the case here. I can go to Robert, Nancy, or Mary, and know that they will welcome my question gladly. That’s important to me.” Time and again the tutors commented on a welcoming, friendly, even fun work environment. “I go to the center even when I’m not working!” offered one tutor. “I just want to be there.”

- Faculty and WAC

Faculty invested in WAC’s well being and increased utilization by students made clear how the larger Loyola community views WAC—positively. Here are some comments from faculty:

I appreciate how pro-active WAC is. Robert follows up on emails so quickly and effectively when I have a question or concern.

I’ve never heard a complaint from students about the services at the Writing Center.

I appreciate the cosmic awareness of the importance of writing that the Center’s tutors and WAC’s administrators promote.

I rely on the faculty reports sent from the Writing Center. I like to know what the student comes in with and what they leave with after their appointment.

It’s clear the tutors are doing professional work and they act professionally with the students from my classes.

WAC is a well-oiled machine and runs very professionally.

- Other WAC Highlights

--WAC workshops seem to have been quite successful since 2010. Currently there are three workshops offered each semester.
Also noteworthy is the Summer Workshop for Young Writers.

One administrator said that the WAC staff “fundamentally change the way I teach.” Then added, “They showed me that the problem wasn’t with my students’ writing, it was with my assignments.”

The community outreach program with Lusher Charter High School should be commended. The Loyola WAC helped the local high school launch their own WAC Center in the fall of 2010.

Suggestions for Improving WAC

• Space Concerns

With an ever-increasing number of tutorials provided each academic year (from 1,282 visits in ’06-’07 to 1,556 visits in ’10-’11), the Writing Center needs a new physical space. In meeting with the Dean and Provost it was suggested this expansion of the Writing Center footprint would take place within the next 3-4 years. WAC staff made clear they hope to maintain their centralized location in Bobet Hall. An expanded physical presence on the first floor of Bobet seems to be a natural growth of the positive work WAC has been doing the past few years. In meeting with faculty, one person said, “During busy weeks, it looks like a nightclub in the hallway with students waiting in line to get in for an appointment.” While being busy and in-demand is a positive, not being able to attend to students’ needs is problematic. The current space is entirely too small and simply cramped.

When it comes time for the renovations in Bobet Hall, WAC staff should work closely with facilities management from Loyola and the architectural firm hired. Along with a number of round table tutorial spaces, there should be ample room for computer
workstations, and a lounge area with couches and chairs for students waiting for appointments and for tutors to congregate in between sessions.

- **Administrative Support**

  While administrative representatives from the College of Humanities and Natural Sciences speak well of WAC, there needs to be a clearer partnership between the Dean and WAC. WAC has many challenges ahead, some of which include: 1) discussing and implementing a strategic plan; 2) implementing an outcomes assessment tool; and 3) making a Writing Intensive program visible and practiced not just in the College of Humanities and Natural Sciences, but possibly University-wide. This will take not only the full commitment from the Dean and the WAC staff, but clearly this will take additional money to attend assessment conferences and to host in-house faculty writing retreats/workshops. With any college or University-wide initiative, faculty “buy in” is paramount.

- **Assessment**

  In regards to designing a reasonable and workable assessment tool, one possibility might be the use of portfolios. One administrator suggested there needs to be a clearer working relationship between WAC and the Composition program. One might also consider including the First-Year Seminar program to construct a triumvirate. Students enrolled in these programs would be required to keep a portfolio of their work. In terms of assessment, a “read around” committee should be formed involving faculty from WAC, Composition, and the First-Year Seminar. “Blind” reading of randomly selected student essays would occur, using an agreed upon scoring rubric. And a variety of writing genres should be showcased in portfolio work. Analytical, thesis-driven essays are the foundation
of college writing, but other artifacts should exist. Possibilities include: creative writing, book or play reviews, journal entries, letters to the editor, personal histories, etc.

- WAC Advisory Board

To re-invigorate the recently reconstituted WAC Advisory Board, there might be consideration given to designating a writing liaison in each department within the College of Humanities and Natural Sciences. (Consideration might also be given to designating a writing liaison in every department across the University, depending on whether or not a University-wide Writing Intensive initiative is put into place.)

These writing point persons may be nominated by department chairs and take on the role of writing spokesperson at departmental meetings when writing issues/concerns emerge. When WAC has announcements of any policy changes or news of upcoming events or workshops, the writing liaison will share this information with his/her department. The departmental writing point person will also share with the WAC staff any concerns or suggestions about writing issues/concerns on campus. As anyone invested in the teaching of writing knows, it certainly does “take a village” to create strong undergraduate writers. One administrator suggested WAC begin considering “pushing their identity beyond traditional boundaries.” Effectively utilizing the reconstituted Advisory Board will help in this effort.

- WAC Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Program

Established in the spring of 2007, it now appears the WAC Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Program needs to be revisited and re-envisioned. A number of administrators and faculty suggested that in the reconsideration of the program, more attention be placed on the
partnership between the faculty member and WAC TA. One administrator said, “There needs to be more obligation from the faculty. The faculty member needs to meet with the TA before the course even begins to have a fuller vision of what the work involves.”

- WAC Tutors

In conversations with administrators and faculty alike, one point of concern that kept arising was the occasional “unevenness” of the quality of tutoring provided at the Writing Center. The problem seems to come about with some of the Work Study tutors simply assigned to the center without a vetting process. Currently the Writing Center employs 14 Work Study tutors and 9 Student Assistants who are interviewed for the position of tutor. It’s clear that not all the Work Study tutors are problematic. For those students who are not quite up for the challenge of a demanding on-campus job, perhaps they could be shifted to other duties at the center.

For example, currently each tutor is charged with uploading tutoring reports and data entry at tutorial’s end. Perhaps designating a Work Study tutor(s) to be in charge of maintaining data entry would help the issue of tutor “quality control.”

Increasing the budget for more Student Assistants would only benefit the Writing Center and Loyola. Clearly there should be more vetted tutors working in the Center than Work Study positions.

Speaking of budget concerns, in an effort to help professionalize the undergraduate tutors, money should be earmarked for conference presentations and travel. The International Writing Centers Association hosts a yearly conference open to peer tutors, graduate students, faculty, and staff. Depending on the conference site location, travel for a small group might not be economically feasible. (Fall 2012 the IWCA will meet in San
Diego, CA.) Closer to home, however, is the South Central Writing Centers Association. These conferences not only provide a professional experience for undergraduate tutors, they also help attending faculty and staff network with other Writing Centers to exchange best practices and discuss potential collaborative projects. A few years down the road after the Writing Center moves into its new and improved home on campus, the Loyola community should consider hosting a South Central Writing Centers Association conference.

- **Professional Tutors**

  It is clear with the ever-increasing traffic at the Writing Center and a diverse population seeking assistance that the time is now to create a plan to hire discipline-specific Professional Tutors. Representatives from Nursing and Business were especially interested in making this a priority for the Writing Center. Professional Tutors would not only assist in discipline-specific requests, they also lend an air of gravitas to the Center and non-traditional students might feel more at ease working with them. Too, faculty working on professional journal articles or book manuscripts might use the services of the Writing Center.

- **Faculty involvement with the Writing Center**

  Two interesting suggestions came out of meeting with faculty: 1) Some faculty offered an interest in taking the “Practicum in Teaching Writing” course so as to be better acquainted with the pedagogical concerns and interests of the Writing Center, and 2) One faculty member suggested holding office hours in the Writing Center to meet with students about their writing. This might work if a faculty member possibly offered one hour each week or every other week. With the current space constraints, I think this suggestion needs
to be tabled until the new Writing Center space opens for business. It is an exciting possibility, envisioning peer tutors and faculty working side-by-side on a regular basis.

- WAC “Kudos”

In meeting with one administrator, it was mentioned that WAC deserves kudos for all their hard work and dedication to the University in helping not only promote the importance of writing, but also in making better writers at Loyola, and preparing students for their futures. Because of this tireless work, how might the administration reward the WAC team of Director, Assistant Director, and Faculty Writing Consultant? Higher education often overlooks the “unsung heroes” working quietly behind the scenes, supporting students. Besides increasing the Student Assistant and operating budgets, the University might consider putting its support behind a University-wide initiative to launch a Writing-Intensive Program. One need only read the NCTE’s report titled “Writing in the Twenty-First Century” to be reminded of the importance of writing for the students’ futures. ([http://www.ncte.org/press/21stcentwriting](http://www.ncte.org/press/21stcentwriting))

The University needs to keep in mind that if this Writing-Intensive Program is launched, WI designated courses need to remain capped at no more than 20 students. (Ideally a WI course should be capped at 15.)

The current teaching load of the Director and Assistant Director seem to be appropriate, though the Faculty Writing Consultant’s teaching load should be reduced; it is clearly too much coupled with the demands of an increasingly busy Writing Center.
• Conclusion

It would be my pleasure to clarify or further discuss any of my observations and/or suggestions in this external review. I once again thank the very kind administration, faculty, staff, and students of Loyola University who made my short visit a very pleasant and productive one.

Respectfully submitted,

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