

Writing program evaluation: an outline for self-study

WPA Board of Consultant Evaluators

At the CCCC conference in Washington, D.C., March 12, 1980, Harvey Wiener, president of WPA, convened a seven-hour training session for WPA's new Board of Consultant Evaluators. The meeting's goal was to initiate the WPA writing program consultation service established with the support of the Exxon Education Foundation.

The board drew upon the considerable knowledge and expertise of its members to draft a set of guidelines and standards for its own use. The following outline for self-study is based on that draft. The board is aware that the outline does not address *every* possible concern of every writing program. An outline of this sort can best serve as a heuristic: a tool that WPAs and their colleagues may find useful in reviewing their programs' goals, needs, and procedures.

Members of the WPA Board of Consultant Evaluators for 1980 are David Bartholomae, University of Pittsburgh; Kenneth A. Bruffee, Brooklyn College; Harry H. Crosby, Boston University; Ken Davis, University of Kentucky; Michael C. Flanigan, Indiana University; Maxine Hairston, University of Texas; Winifred Horner, University of Missouri-Columbia; Erika Lindemann, University of North Carolina; Elaine P. Maimon, Beaver College; Donald A. McQuade, Queens College; Ellen Nold, Stanford University; Mark E. Smith, Northern Michigan University; William Ellsworth Smith, Utah State University; Nathaniel Teich, University of Oregon; Joseph F. Trimmer, Ball State University; Harvey Wiener, La Guardia Community College; and Joseph M. Williams, University of Chicago.

Questions for writing program self-study

Curriculum

Courses and goals

1. What writing courses are currently taught? How are they related? Are they required? If so, of whom? What are their prerequisites?
2. What are the goals of the writing program? How were these goals arrived at? Are they periodically reviewed? What has been done to implement them?
3. What goals do the administration and faculty in other departments think the

writing program should have? How do the goals of the writing program accord with the goals of the institution as a whole?

4. What specific connections have been established with feeder schools (high schools, community colleges) to improve writing instruction and the quality of student preparation?

Syllabus

1. Does each writing course have a syllabus? Are the syllabuses uniform or individual?

2. Is there a logical sequence of courses, and of course units or assignments within each course? How does each syllabus relate to program goals and institutional goals?

3. Are there opportunities for faculty to share and develop syllabuses? What control does the writing program administrator have over syllabuses and their development?

4. What opportunities exist for experimentation?

5. How is class time apportioned per day, per week, and per term?

6. How much writing, and what kind of writing, must students do for each course?

7. Is the amount of assigned reading in the writing courses controlled? What is the purpose or function of reading assigned in the writing courses?

Instructional methods and materials

1. What methods are used to deal with student writing in the program's writing courses? Are these methods consistent with the program's goals?

2. What kinds of classroom activities are most common?

3. Do the writing courses use textbooks? How many and what kind (handbooks, rhetorics, anthologies, workbooks, dictionaries, etc.)? Which books are used in which courses?

4. Who makes decisions about texts? What options are available for faculty and for teaching assistants or adjunct faculty?

5. Why is the program using the textbooks it is currently using?

6. What instructional materials and media does the program use other than textbooks?

7. Does the program use student writing as instructional material? Are there reproduction facilities readily available to duplicate student work for class use?

8. Do writing teachers have adequate office space for conferring with students?

Testing

1. What tests and testing procedures does the program currently use for placement and exemption? Why are these particular tests used? Have they been

validated for the population of students they are administered to at this institution?

2. How are placement decisions made and carried out? Does the program evaluate proficiency? If so, how?

3. How are the tests administered? Who administers them? Who scores them? How are those who administer and score tests compensated? What kind of and how much compensation do they get?

4. What is the program's policy on transfer students?

Grading practices

1. What is the institution's grading system? How does the program's grading system relate to the institution's grading system?

2. How are grades determined in individual courses? Are there agreed-upon criteria? If so, how are these criteria enforced? If not, how does the program arrive at uniformity in grading?

3. How do students perceive the program's grading system? What has been done to find out?

Program administration

Institutional and program structure

1. What is the size and makeup of the department or administrative unit in which the writing program is housed? What is the governing structure of that department or unit? What percentage of full-time faculty at each rank, adjunct faculty, and graduate students teach writing?

2. How many writing courses do faculty at each rank or status teach?

3. What is the internal governing structure of the writing program? Is there a writing program administrator ("director of freshman English," "composition committee chair," etc.)? If so, what is the WPA's administrative relation to other levels of administration? To whom is the WPA responsible?

4. How is the writing program related through administration and curriculum to other departments and divisions in the institution?

5. If there are night school or nondegree programs, what control does the WPA have over the way writing is taught in those programs? How does the WPA exercise that control? What responsibility does the WPA have for the teaching of writing in other departments or colleges within the institution?

6. Where do the funds that support the writing program come from? Who administers that money? What is it spent on?

7. Who hires, promotes, tenures, salaries, and assigns courses to writing staff?

8. How are new teaching positions in the writing program determined, and by whom?

9. Who determines class size, curriculum, and teaching load?

10. How are the program's internal problems solved? Who decides on syllabuses, testing procedures, textbooks, curriculum, etc.? What *voice* do full-time faculty, part-time faculty, teaching assistants, and students have in shaping writing program policies? What permanent or *ad hoc* committees relevant to the writing program exist? How are these committees appointed? What do they do?

11. What are the procedures for negotiating complaints about grading, teaching, and administrative processes and policies?

Writing program administrator's job description

1. How is the WPA chosen?
2. What is the current WPA's academic and professional background?
3. What is the WPA's rank and tenure status? Is the WPA tenured? If not, why not?
4. What is the WPA's teaching load?
5. What is the WPA responsible for?
6. To whom is the WPA responsible?
7. How long does the WPA hold the job? Is there a specified term of appointment? What provisions are there for reviewing the quality of the WPA's work and the quality of the WPA's contribution to the writing program and institution as a whole?
8. What rewards are there for doing high-quality work as a WPA? Who grants these rewards?

Faculty development

Current conditions

1. How many full-time and part-time *people* teach writing?
2. What training and experience do these teachers have? What professional organizations do they belong to? What is their record of research, publication, and conference participation?
3. How are high-quality teaching and research rewarded, especially in terms of salary increase, promotion, and tenure?
4. What courses, speaker programs, workshops, awards, and support services does the program offer or support to encourage excellence in teaching writing? What opportunities for faculty development already exist? Who uses them? How do faculty find out about them? In what ways are faculty encouraged to avail themselves of these opportunities?
5. What kinds of work and activities occur during department or program staff meetings? How frequently are these meetings held? Who attends them?

Support for faculty development

1. How is "faculty development" defined as a goal of the institution, the depart-

ment or administrative unit, and the writing program?

2. What financial resources are available for workshops, speakers, travel to conferences, research, developing and evaluating new writing courses and new teaching techniques?

3. What is the faculty attitude toward faculty development? What is the faculty attitude toward training that is designed to improve the teaching of writing? What is the attitude of composition teachers toward literature teachers, and vice versa? What is the attitude of faculty in one area of the writing program (basic skills, technical writing, advanced composition, etc.) toward faculty in other areas of the writing program?

4. What avenues exist for writing teachers of every rank and status to design, implement, and evaluate faculty development programs best suited to their needs and interests? How are faculty encouraged to develop their skills in composition research and teaching writing? What opportunities exist for learning about faculty development programs in effect at other institutions?

5. Does the department publicly support excellence in writing through scholarships, writing contests, magazines of student writing, etc.?

6. What opportunities for faculty development are planned for the near future?

Support services

Definition

A support service is any academic or service unit that reinforces the writing program and coordinates its services with the writing program's goals, curriculum, and administrative procedures.

Organization

1. What services exist at the institution? What specific kinds of help do these services offer to students and faculty? What kinds of materials and techniques does each support service use? Does the service use a variety of materials and techniques, or does it focus mainly on one type?

2. What are the goals and instructional plans of each service? Do any services offered by the writing program and the support services overlap? Do their common goals and procedures reinforce each other or conflict?

3. In what institutional ways (through scheduling, a coordinating committee, handbook exchange, etc.) is each support service coordinated with the writing program?

4. Do all the faculty in the writing program and elsewhere in the institution know that all these services exist? What is the faculty attitude toward these services? Do they send their students to them, or use them themselves?

5. Who uses each support service? How many students and which faculty? What is the profile of students who use each service?

6. How is information about each service spread to students and faculty?

7. How are students placed in or referred to each support service?
8. What evidence is there that each service meets the goals it sets for itself or that the institution has set for it?

Personnel

1. What are the qualifications for working in each support service? How are the director and staff selected for each? What is the institutional status (faculty, graduate student, full-time, part-time, etc.) of support service personnel? How are they compensated for their work? How is their work evaluated?
2. How are support service personnel trained?
3. What evidence is there of professional development among support service personnel?
4. What opportunities are there for professional development of support service personnel? How does the institution reward support service personnel for improving the service and for developing *themselves* professionally?
5. What kind of relationship exists between the writing program faculty and support service personnel? How do support service personnel view the writing program faculty, and vice versa? Do writing program faculty and support service personnel meet regularly to discuss students involved in both programs? Is there an active exchange of information on curricular and administrative matters?
6. What role do support service personnel play in formulating writing program policy? What role do writing program faculty play in formulating the policies and procedures of support services?

Administration

1. Do students get credit for work completed in support services? If so, how is credit determined?
2. How is each support service funded? Who decides how the money is spent? How is it currently being spent?
3. Does each support service keep records of expenditures, contact hours, enrollment, student work completed, services rendered, credit earned, etc?
4. Does each support service follow up on students who have used its services?
5. Is there continuing self-evaluation of each service by its staff? Is each service regularly evaluated by someone not actively involved in its work?
6. What coordination exists between the support services, the writing program, and the institution's admissions and recruitment officers?
7. What are the short- and long-range goals of each support service? How does each plan to reach these goals?