

**WPA CONSULTANT-EVALUATOR SERVICE  
of the Council of Writing Program Administrators**

**Guidelines for Self-Study to Precede WPA Visit**  
Revised, Reviewed, and Approved by C-E Panel March 2019

The WPA Consultant-Evaluator service offers colleagues the occasion to assess and improve writing instruction at their school. Writing the study provides opportunities for communication among stakeholders and articulating goals for the visit. Hence, a self-study is ideally prepared by a team of colleagues, not by one individual. The Consultant-Evaluators should receive your self-study at least one month before their visit.

The average length of a self-study is 15-20 double-spaced pages, exclusive of supporting documents, but there is no set length. The study should be largely a narrative report focusing on main concerns. The introduction should indicate the scope of the unit being evaluated and identify the unit's relationships to institutional mission and context.

*The questions below are not intended as a report outline. You are welcome to be selective and respond to questions that will help your unit best serve your program.*

## **I. VISIT FOCUS AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT**

Describe your program, department, unit, and/or writing center. Identify topics to be addressed in the visit: e.g., graduate programs; majors/minors/concentrations; general education writing; WAC/WID; athlete tutorial services. Include professional or student publications "owned" by the program. Provide information about the physical space the program/unit occupies and facilities (e.g., labs, office space).

### **A. Focus of the Visit**

1. What are the most pressing current concerns?
2. What changes are being contemplated or contested?
3. What issues would you like the Consultant-Evaluators to address?

### **B. Current Institutional Conditions**

1. What specific institutional features are affecting your program?
2. What specific characteristics of your student body affect the work?
3. What internal or external pressures/constraints influence effectiveness?

### **C. Missions**

1. What is the mission of your institution?
2. What is the mission of your writing program or unit and how does it support the mission of your institution?

### **D. Philosophy and Goals**

1. What are the principles or philosophy of student learning at your institution? What professional/disciplinary guidelines inform pedagogy and practice?
2. What are the philosophy and goals of your writing program?
3. How do your writing program's practices enact the philosophy and goals?

## **II. ADMINISTRATION AND STRUCTURE**

## **A. Institutional and Program Structure**

1. What writing programs are there on campus (e.g., degree programs, first-year composition courses, writing centers, writing across the curriculum or writing intensive courses, technical writing courses, and first-year seminars)?
2. What is the size and make-up of each of the departments or administrative units in which these programs are housed? What is the governing structure of each? How are these related administratively?
3. What are the internal governing structures? Are there writing program administrators (e.g., department head, director of first-year composition, composition committee chair, director of the writing center)? If so, what are the administrative relations to other levels of administration? What are the chains of communication and responsibility?
4. If there are online, evening, continuing education, or non-degree programs, who determines how writing is taught in those programs? What are the procedures governing hiring? Who is responsible for the teaching of writing in other departments or colleges within the institution?
5. How are the teaching and tutoring of writing funded? Who controls these funds? How are these funds spent? How does that funding compare to the funding of other campus units?
6. Are institutional grant funds available for professional or program development (e.g., curriculum development and assessment)? Have you or your colleagues received these grants?
7. Who hires, promotes, and tenures the writing faculty throughout the institution? Who determines their salaries and assigns courses to them?
8. How are new teaching positions determined and by whom?
9. Who determines class size, curriculum, and teaching or tutoring loads? What criteria affect these determinations?
10. Who decides on syllabi, testing procedures, textbooks, etc.? What procedures are in place for full-time faculty, adjunct faculty, teaching assistants, and students to help shape policies?
11. What permanent or *ad hoc* committees related to writing instruction exist? How are committees appointed? Who serves on them (e.g., full-time faculty, adjuncts, and students)? What do these committees do?
12. What are the procedures for negotiating student and faculty concerns or complaints about grading, teaching, harassment, learning atmosphere, and administrative processes and policies?
13. What administrative, clerical, and technical support is available? Are there additional needs for support?
14. How are writing program work and histories documented (e.g., annual reports, status reports on progress toward multi-year development plans, archives)? Who writes these histories and who reads them? How are they used?
15. How are writing programs assessed? How often? For what purposes? Is assessment a regular part of the program's work? Are these assessments intended to be evaluative or formative or both?

## **B. Writing Program Administrators / Writing Center Directors / WAC Coordinators**

1. How are the administrative leaders chosen and how long are their appointments?
2. What are their terms and conditions of appointments? Are these terms in writing?
3. What are the academic and professional qualifications of these administrators? What are their ranks and tenure statuses? Who decides their tenures, promotions, terms of service, and salaries?
4. What are the administrators' teaching loads and how do they compare with other faculties' loads?
5. How much and what types of research are these administrators expected to do? To what extent are pedagogical development, assessment, and institutional research considered scholarship?
6. How and by whom are these administrators evaluated and rewarded?

### **III. CURRICULUM**

Describe the curriculum. An appendix may include curricular tables with course numbers and names. Include a description of students who enroll in these courses: majors, minors, non-majors, honors. If your program is a writing center you wish to skip this section.

#### **A. Philosophy and Goals**

1. How does your curriculum reflect your program's philosophy and goals?
2. How are the philosophy and goals communicated to teachers, students, and appropriate administrators?

#### **B. Courses and Syllabi**

1. What writing courses are currently taught in your institution?
2. What departments other than your own teach writing?
3. How are courses sequenced or otherwise related? Which courses are required, and for-whom are they required?
4. If your institution identifies some students as "basic writers," what criteria and/or processes are used to make that designation, and how are those students' needs addressed?
5. How are the needs of international students and English Language Learners met?
6. Are the syllabi for the courses uniform or different for each teacher? (If the syllabus is uniform, is it within each course or for several sections within each course, and who is responsible for developing it?)
7. If the syllabus is uniform within each course, what opportunities do individual teachers have for experimentation with their curricula? If the syllabi are individual, what ties or links make the course cohere across the sections?
8. What is the basis for the sequence of assignments within each course? How does that sequence relate to the goals and philosophy?
9. How much writing, and what kinds of writing, must students do for each course?
10. What kinds of reading are assigned in the writing courses? What instruction is given to students in the reading of these texts? In the reading of drafts?
11. Is writing the primary topic of the courses, or are other topics or approaches integrated (e.g., reading, multimedia, research methods, social justice)?
12. How does course design relate to professional best practices?

#### **C. Instructional Methods and Materials**

1. What activities typically take place in the courses and tutorials?
2. What course materials are used in each course? How do they fit the pedagogical goals? Who chooses them and by what criteria?
3. How much time do teachers devote to student conferences?
4. Is a thematic approach employed? If so, how are themes chosen and developed?

#### **D. Online Instruction**

1. Do you offer fully online writing courses? If so, describe which courses at which levels (e.g. FYC, advanced composition, graduate). In your estimation, are they successful? How might they be improved?
2. Do you offer hybrid/blended writing courses? If so, describe which courses at which levels (e.g. FYC, advanced composition, graduate). In your estimation, are they successful? How might they be improved?
3. Describe the content delivery, discussion format, workshop, seat time, instructor response, conferences, grading, course evaluation procedures, etc.
4. How is writing improvement demonstrated?

5. What is the student-teacher ratio?
6. What preparation/support is provided to instructors?
7. What forms of oversight does the writing program have in place?
8. Does the WPA, Writing Center Director, or WAC Coordinator have access to syllabi, modules, courses in progress?
9. Are classes “observed” by peers or the WPA? Writing Center Director?
10. What students are these courses intended to reach? Nonresident? Resident? Both? Are courses part of a fully online degree program?
11. How are classes funded? Do online students pay differential tuition? How are instructors/ graders compensated, particularly in comparison with F2F instructors/ graders? If students are charged a separate online fee, who receives that additional revenue?
12. Do students have computer access to enroll and complete online courses?
13. What data do you systematically collect or have reported to you on student enrollment, persistence, completion, and overall success?
14. How are instructors for online courses hired and evaluated?
15. How are courses assessed/evaluated?
16. How is student and instructor feedback used to improve the courses?

#### **E. Responses to and Evaluation of Student Writing**

1. When and how do students receive responses to their writing? What kinds of responses do they receive? When do students receive formal evaluation?
2. What procedures do faculty use in evaluating students' writing (e.g., grades on each text, grades on some work only)? On what criteria do faculty evaluate work?
3. What processes are used to assure consistency across sections in evaluation of students' writing? How does the program assure that the bases for evaluation cohere with the programmatic goals?
4. How does the evaluation of students' work reflect their achievement of the stated goals of the course?
5. Do students have the opportunity to publish or present their writing in oral or written formats? If so, what are these?

#### **F. Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes?**

1. What procedures are used program for placement, exemption, exit readiness, determination of eligibility to enter a more advanced program and capstone experience? What procedures are used to correct errors in placement?
2. Under what conditions are the assessment procedures conducted? Who conducts them? Who interprets and uses the results? What training do those who conduct the assessment (e.g., scorers) have?
3. What methods are used for continued monitoring of assessment instruments to assure their reliability and validity? How frequently is monitoring done?
4. What are the feedback loops to improve effectiveness? How could they be improved?

### **IV. INCLUSION**

We encourage you to offer information about the following matters.

#### **A. Diversity and Inclusion**

1. How does your program work to support diversity and inclusion?
2. How do principles of diversity and inclusion inform curricular, pedagogical, placement, and assessment practices?

#### **B. Accessibility**

1. Are all of your teaching and learning spaces accessible?
2. How does your unit support students, faculty, and staff with accessibility needs and concerns? What aspects of accessibility are particularly important on your campus? What offices, policies, programs, personnel are available to address them? What additions or improvements are needed?
3. How does your unit support faculty and staff who have accessibility needs? What resources exist? What is needed?
4. Discuss how professional development helps faculty and staff learn about and use support services and resources; how curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment promote accessibility.

## **V. FACULTY**

### **A. Status and Working Conditions**

1. What percentage of full-time faculty at each rank, adjunct faculty, and graduate students, and graduate and undergraduate tutors teach writing? How many writing courses do faculty at each rank or status teach? What percentage of those courses are taught by faculty at each rank or status?
2. What are the qualifications for writing faculty, and how are they established? What training and experience in teaching writing do the writing faculty have? What professional organizations do they belong to? What is their record of research, publication, conference participation, and professional activity in composition and rhetoric?
3. What are the salary ranges by rank and category? How do these ranges align with comparable departments? To neighboring, comparable institutions? Are there other incentives for contributions and achievement?
4. How are teaching, administration, and research in composition rewarded in terms of salary, promotion, and tenure?
5. How are adjunct faculty appointed? By whom? When in relation to the opening of a term? How are they evaluated? What is the length of their appointment? How are they reappointed? Are there pathways for advancement or promotion? What percentage have multiple-year contracts? How are adjunct faculty compensated in terms of salary and benefits? Are there step raises or cost of living increases for adjunct faculty? Are adjunct faculty compensated for preparation if a course does not fill or is covered by a full-time faculty member? Is there a departmental policy on percentage of part-time faculty? Do adjunct faculty attend department meetings or program meetings? Serve on committees? What opportunities exist for adjunct faculty to develop curriculum, choose textbooks, and formulate policy and procedures? What arrangements are made for office space, meeting attendance, committee participation, technology, phones, mailboxes, and clerical support for adjunct faculty?
6. What are the processes and policies for assigning writing courses to available qualified staff? Please include processes for assigning course overloads to writing faculty, selecting faculty for summer or January session teaching assignments, and reassigning faculty when classes are cancelled.
7. How faculty are evaluated and how often? Are there annual reviews? If so, who conducts them? Are there regular class observations? What are the policies and bylaws that cover those activities?

### **B. Faculty Development**

1. How is faculty/tutor development supported by the institution, writing center, department or writing program? What courses, speaker programs, workshops, teaching awards, etc. does the unit offer to encourage excellence in writing instruction?
2. What opportunities for faculty development in teaching writing already exist? Who uses them? How do faculty find out about them? In what ways are faculty encouraged to avail themselves of these opportunities? Are there new plans for faculty development in teaching writing?

3. Are these opportunities available to adjunct faculty and teaching assistants?
4. Are issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation addressed in faculty development?
5. Are procedures for helping “students of concern” addressed in faculty development?
6. What mechanisms exist for teachers and tutors to help diverse learners succeed?
7. What financial resources are available for travel to workshops, conferences, and institutes related to teaching writing?
8. What avenues exist for writing faculty at each 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 writing at other institutions?
9. Does the unit or institution support faculty development by offering course releases, paid leaves or sabbaticals for further education in composition studies and rhetoric, and attending conferences, by publishing journals, by developing software or other media for use in teaching writing?
10. What support does the unit or institution give for development of institutional and individual grants to improve writing instruction and for released time, overhead, and other support to carry out the grant?

## **VI. RELATED PROGRAMS AND UNITS**

Discuss the relationships between your program and any other programs charged with writing instruction.

### **A. Administration**

1. Do services offered by your and other units overlap? Describe the interaction between units? Do their common goals and procedures reinforce each other or conflict? In what formal and informal ways (through scheduling, a coordinating committee, etc.) are the units related?
2. How is each unit funded? How does each unit follow up on students who use its services?
3. How is credit determined for work in these units?
4. What arrangements exist for the evaluation of each unit?
5. What official or unofficial channels exist for communication among units? What channels should be implemented?

### **B. Curriculum**

1. How many students, staff, and faculty are associated with each unit?
2. What is the profile of the students?
3. How are students placed in or referred to each unit?
4. What kinds of materials and techniques (tutoring, workshops) do the units use?
5. How do students learn about the units?

### **C. Personnel**

1. What are the job descriptions for the director and teaching staff? How are they selected?
2. What is the institutional status (faculty, full-time, part-time, graduate student, etc.) of personnel? How are they compensated for their work? How is their work evaluated? What provisions exist for staff training and professional development?

## **VII. ADDITIONAL RELEVANT INFORMATION**

*You may wish to include additional documentation such as the following in an appendix to the self-study:*

- a visual layout of your writing center,
- course/programmatic outcomes
- a course grid for the major and minor, with electives.
- Statistical information for the previous and current academic year: enrollments, class sizes, composition of the teaching staff, final grade distribution.
- A description of each course within the program(s) to be evaluated (e.g. objectives, syllabi, placement and exemption procedures, grading criteria).
- Evaluative instruments.
- Materials for teacher preparation (both faculty and graduate students), including orientation meeting agendas, workshop descriptions, and syllabi for methods courses.
- A list of instructional and administrative staff and their professional credentials.
- School catalogues, department handbooks, and student publications.

### **VIII. QUESTIONS PERTINENT TO YOUR UNIT'S WORK**

Please raise any questions or concerns that are not addressed in the *Guidelines*. That will allow the consultants to address ideas, queries, and concerns that are important to you and your colleagues as you work to help your students.