Recommendations

Based on the needs outlined above, the committee recommends focusing improvement efforts on four general areas:

- Faculty, Student, and University Involvement
- Clarity of Expectations
- Quality of Assignments
- Effective Evaluation of Student Work

The suite of recommendations presented below attends to these various areas. In some cases, these recommended areas for improvement require behavioral shifts, and in other cases they would require additional resources, as in the case of adapting or augmenting programmatic offerings. An effort has been made to balance the recommendations presented between local-level opportunities for improvements without the additional investment of financial resources, as well as innovative opportunities to improve undergraduate writing at OSU through the development of programs requiring a modest additional investment. Because current conditions are not dire, we have not presented a single solution. Rather, we are offering a number of possibilities which we believe would be viable and beneficial in order to reorient OSU undergraduates’ experiences and outcomes related to writing. Regardless of the specific combination of recommendations that are selected for adoption, we continue to believe that the most crucial foundational element is to build a culture of writing at OSU: a goal that requires the sustained commitment from all levels of the university, including students, faculty, and administration.

I. Faculty, Student, and University Involvement

Because developing students’ abilities in writing is a multi-level, multi-faceted endeavor, we believe that there needs to be more of a culture of writing developed on the OSU campus. Involvement—from students, faculty, and university administration—is crucial to this process. Successful involvement at these levels will likely include the following components:

1. **Students**—particularly those with special needs related to writing—need to be able to effectively seek and utilize resources.
2. **Faculty** need adequate information about expectations related to writing classes, support to meet those expectations, and guidance to design courses accordingly.
3. **University administration** can aid this work by publically highlighting the importance of writing at OSU, and by supporting the BCC and its constituents in the management and improvement of writing-related courses. While the BCC holds oversight responsibilities for the Bacc Core, university administration can help to facilitate this work via activities such as the following:
   - President Ray could mention the importance of writing in his annual address and/or related public announcements.
   - Central administration could voice its commitment to ensuring that capped courses (e.g. WIC) maintain the required class size requirements.
   - Additional resources could be devoted to pilot programs such as the Writing Advocate model traced out below.
   - Resources could likewise be provided in order to help the BCC require that departments meet the cap requirements in WIC courses.

We believe that the new efforts to improve assessment of Bacc Core courses are valuable, and we believe that the new model for gathering information about
Synthesis courses, for example, should include attention to the kinds and amount of writing that is being assigned in these courses. The appointment of a director for implementation of the Bacc Core is a positive development, and is probably an ongoing need. As assessments of Bacc Core curricular components move forward, we recommend continued backing—via both public endorsements and resources—from the university’s central administration. The success of undergraduate writing at OSU depends on demonstrated commitment from all levels of the university.

II. Clarity of Expectations

Reports from faculty indicated that clear expectations are crucial to students’ success. Therefore, expectations should be made clear to students themselves, and faculty should likewise have a clear sense of the writing components that are required in Baccalaureate Core courses. We recommend improving clarity in the following areas:

1. **Synthesis Courses:** Currently, faculty are unclear about the writing components that are required in Synthesis courses. It may be that faculty are not aware that Synthesis courses are a part of the overall writing curriculum within the Baccalaureate Core. Therefore, we recommend the following actions:
   - Establish clearer expectations for the writing requirements in Synthesis courses. One possibility is to add a required word count for the argumentative paper that students writing as part of the new outcomes for Synthesis courses. If a word count is adopted, we would recommend that the paper should be at least 5 pages, or 1250 words.
   - Require revision within Synthesis courses. Currently, revision is not required. However, the NSSE consortium data suggests that OSU students need more practice with revision.
   - Increase the information literacy components within Synthesis courses. Information literacy skills are essential to all students’ success at OSU and beyond, and it is appropriate that upper-division courses with writing components also include practice with information literacy.
   - Embed these new requirements into the new online assessment of Synthesis courses. Doing so will remind faculty of the requirements and allow university administration to track classes that either do or do not follow these regulations.

2. **Uniform Curriculum:** In some cases, such as Writing II courses, there are many sections of a course offered, although not all sections utilize the same outcomes, assignments, or course content. These courses should be brought into more clear alignment so that students and faculty know what to expect, both with respect to students’ experiences in the courses themselves, as well as their projected skill set once they successfully complete these courses.

3. **Guided Advising:** In addition to improving the uniformity and transparency of curriculum in Writing II courses, information about these courses should be made available to advisors across campus. Advisors working with first-year and sophomore students need to be able to advise students correctly about which 200-level writing class will best suit their needs. We suggest creating a list of updated course descriptions, including outcomes, and forwarding it to all advisors toward the beginning of spring term each
year, such that advisors will be able to draw on that information for the purposes of students’ course planning during the following year.

4. **Departmental Communication:** In addition to improving infrastructure in these ways, we believe that it is important for all departments to have a means of accessing information about Baccalaureate Core writing requirements (including updates) and of vetting related ideas with respect to the parameters of the discipline treated in each department. Therefore, we suggest that OSU develop a system of Faculty Writing Advocates: a group of representatives from each department who will be trained on updates and best practices related to writing components within the Baccalaureate Core. The Faculty Writing Advocates would serve as leaders within their department, as well as touchstones for university administrators who wish to access information about the way that writing is being taught within a given unit. The Faculty Writing Advocate model was popular in the faculty survey that we issued, and we believe that it would be a beneficial means of improving undergraduate writing at OSU, both within and beyond the Baccalaureate Core. It should be noted, though, that the breadth and success of this model would depend on some form of material investment. In order for departmental Writing Advocates to remain involved in their work in an effective and sustained way, they would need to be compensated in some way.

To date, actions taken in order to improve clarity of expectations regarding writing in the Baccalaureate Core including the following items:

1. New outcomes for Writing II courses have been established, and all courses are now using them. Key courses such as WR 327: Technical Writing, the highest enrolling WR II course, has been reviewed in order to create better alignment. WR 327 now has a list of shared outcomes and assignments that are specific to the course (Appendix 9).

2. Earlier confusion about WR 121 transfer credits has been resolved. Previously, students were able to transfer in credits from other institutions that satisfied the Writing I category but were not deemed equivalent to WR 121. These students became frustrated when they learned that they must take WR 121, even though they had satisfied the Writing I requirement. Through sustained conversation with the English Department throughout the course of this year, The Office of the Registrar has developed a new system by which to evaluate incoming transfer credits. Moving forward, students will only be given credit for satisfying the Writing I requirement if the course they took is deemed equivalent to WR 121.

### III. Quality of Assignments

Multiple aspects of the data gathered for this report indicate that 1) students need more practice with writing, and 2) faculty do not have sufficient models for designing quality writing assignments. These issues surface in both the quantity and quality of student writing that is currently being produced.

First, the length of assignments is insufficient:

- The NSSE writing consortium data indicates that OSU students write less than do students at peer institutions.
• Syllabi gathered in the Preliminary Findings for the Committee Reviewing Writing in the Baccalaureate Core report indicated that assignments for some courses in areas such as Synthesis courses are brief (see Appendices 4 and 5).

• Faculty survey responses indicate that 70% of assignments are less than 5 pages long. In partial response to this issue, we recommend that requirements be established for writing assignments in Synthesis classes. In particular, it would be wise to include a requirement related to length, so as to ensure that students are getting experience writing longer papers (i.e. over 4 pages) at the advanced level. In addition, a class cap would ideally be placed on Synthesis courses so as to facilitate increased attentiveness to writing. Because teaching writing is labor intensive and students benefit from instructor feedback and revision, classes that include writing should be kept as small as possible. While Synthesis courses may not have as low as cap as do WR 121, Writing II, and WIC courses, we do believe that a reasonable cap should be determined, so as to facilitate the addition of a minimum length requirement for writing assignments.

Second, the quality of assignments is lacking because key components of the writing process (e.g. peer review and revision) are not being utilized in most writing assignments:

• The NSSE writing consortium data indicates that OSU students engage in peer review and writing center visits at levels below that of their students at peer institutions. According to this data, most assignments do not include a peer review component of any kind.

• Syllabi gathered in the Preliminary Findings for the Committee Reviewing Writing in the Baccalaureate Core report indicated that, out of 45 Synthesis classes surveyed, only 6 required peer review and only 6 required revision.

• Faculty survey responses indicated that 45% of assignments require revision, although only 35% require peer review and 33% require a visit to the Writing Center.

In order to improve writing assignments throughout the Baccalaureate Core—including both the quantity and quality of student writing produced—we recommend additional support for faculty development in the area of assignment design. Both the faculty survey and faculty focus group data emphasized the success and the WIC model. However, we believe that faculty development in WIC classes is not sufficient. In addition, we recommend that one or more of the following models be adopted:

• Faculty Writing Advocates: Trained faculty in each department would serve as leaders to build a “culture of writing” in each unit. These Writing Advocates would be available to mentor new faculty, consult on assignment design, etc.

• New Faculty Mentoring: Consultation sessions for new faculty could be offered—through the Center for Teaching and Learning or elsewhere—on best practices related to the development of writing assignments.

• Faculty Pairs could be established within each unit, such that faculty could consult with each other on their assignment design.

• Departmental Professional Development: Writing consultations within each department could be scheduled. Similar to WIC workshops, these sessions could train faculty on the best practices of designing writing assignments. However, these workshops could be targeted at an entire department, as opposed to individual or workshop training through the regular WIC seminars.

Whichever of these models is adopted, the goal would be to improve writing assignments throughout all levels of the Baccalaureate Core curriculum. Writing assignments in all of the
writing classes in the Baccalaureate Core should include best practices of the writing process (e.g. planning, drafting, feedback, revision) and should be sufficiently long for a student to develop a sustained series of thoughts and/or arguments.

IV. Effective Evaluation of Student Work

It is likewise crucial to accurately and thoroughly evaluate student work. This process relates both to identifying students who need additional support and to adequately assessing student work overall.

Student Support

Identifying students who need additional assistance with writing is a challenge because both because faculty/academic departments are not able to diagnose learning disabilities (i.e. one of the more commonly reported challenges that students face in courses like WR 121, see Appendix 1) and because placement systems for writing are complicated and imperfect measures. However, we do recognize and suggest some areas for improvement:

1. **DAS Coordination:** Writing instructors can be in closer communication with DAS, so as to better serve students who have and/or may have learning disabilities that make learning to write difficult. Closer communication with DAS would mean that it would be possible to track students who do have registered learning disabilities that impact writing, and it would mean that instructors could develop multi-modal classroom approaches that would support varieties of learners, including students who may have undiagnosed learning disabilities.

2. **Stretch Model Pilot:** A stretch-class model for WR 121 could be piloted. Stretch classes have been successfully employed at a variety of campuses around the nation. Such classes “stretch” the standard curriculum for a first-year writing class over 1) two academic terms, or 2) more contact hours during one academic term. In either case, students who struggle with writing have more time to develop their skills. We believe that such a model is worth piloting, as it may prove beneficial to low-achieving WR 121 students, INTO students, etc. We recommend recruiting students via advisors and allowing students to self-select this option, if they believe that they would benefit from such support. If numerical identifying information is desired, students’ writing scores on the SAT could be used as a determining factor in recruitment efforts.

3. **Student Reference Resources:** For more general student needs, we suggest that a suite of online writing resources could be developed and made available to students. Such a suite of resources could be developed according to one of the following methods:
   - Brief writing handouts posted on the Writing Center website. Such handouts should particularly include information on what constitutes plagiarism, as faculty believe that students are not sufficiently educated on this topic.
   - A common online writing reference, adopted by all OSU students for their collegiate career. For instance, the textbook company Bedford/St. Martin’s, which currently supplies the print reference books utilized in WR 121 and several of the Writing II courses, has an online writing reference that students can purchase for 4 years. This product, *Writer’s Help*, supplies students with a searchable database.
of reference materials related to writing, editing, and citations. Exercises are also included.

4. Additional Information Literacy Training within the Baccalaureate Core: While we recognize that it may not be possible to add an additional course to the Baccalaureate Core at this time (e.g., pro-school tracks have a particularly difficult time adding credits to students’ course of study), we do believe that many students need additional time devoted to practicing research protocols and techniques. We suggest the following two options as possibilities for increasing the presence of information literacy within the Baccalaureate Core curriculum. We recognize that each of these possibilities represents the potential need for additional resources, particularly with respect to supporting librarians’ possible time and involvement in these endeavors.

- Similar to the Faculty Writing Advocate model recommended above, it may be possible to develop a system of Librarian Literacy Advocates: a model which would make use of the librarians’ existing college/departmental liaison model and highlight the resources and skills that the librarians bring to collaborations with faculty in designing research-oriented writing/project assignments.

- In addition to faculty support, we believe that the eventual addition of a course focused explicitly on research would greatly aid entering OSU students. While WR 121 currently introduces students to issues related to academic writing, including some amount of research skills, students’ overall skills and awareness of the research process is lacking, and WR 121 cannot include more of this material without losing necessary materials that relate specifically to college writing. Therefore, we believe that the Baccalaureate Core should, over time, consider the addition of an introductory research class. This course could be required or elective. If and when such a course is developed, efforts should be made to coordinate with the library, and sufficient resources would need to be devoted to this project in order to ensure that the model is truly feasible.

Assessing Student Work

More consistency is necessary in the area of faculty assessment of student writing. While many units have departmental writing guides, the focus group data indicated that these usage of these documents are would be improved if they included rubric(s) focused on disciplinary genres and departmental outcomes. As these documents are updated over time, we recommend that each unit develop a common rubric to be used in the scoring of student writing. These rubrics would provide faculty with the 4 or 5 most important things to consider when evaluating student writing, particularly as they relate to the genre expectations within the discipline treated by that department. In addition, we believe that the process of developing these rubrics would be beneficial to each department as a whole, as they would provide an opportunity for faculty to discuss which aspects of student writing they value most. Ideally, these discussions would be facilitated by a campus leader who is trained in faculty development and best practices related to writing.

Actions Completed

In order to better serve students who struggle with writing, the WR121 program is increasing communication with DAS. Leadership of the two programs have met in order to discuss patterns in both student bodies. As a result, WR 121 staff are now being regularly trained on issues.
related to learning disabilities and their impact on writing. As a result, instructors are better able to support students with diagnosed learning disabilities, as well as to design classroom activities that serve a variety of student learning styles.

**Ongoing Questions**

While we have identified the areas within the Baccalaureate Core’s writing curriculum that needs the most attention, and we have developed a suite of options for attending to these needs, there remain several key questions about how to support these changes:

- How can new programs and/or programmatic components be developed? For instance, how might we fund a program of Faculty Writing Advocates, an Information Literacy course, or a pilot stretch course for first-year writing curriculum?
- How can we ensure that updated outcomes are communicated effectively across campus?
- How can we ensure that all participants remain accountable to these changes in outcomes and course requirements?
- How can we monitor the effectiveness of writing within the Baccalaureate Core in a more ongoing way?