To: Kate Hunter-Zaworski, Faculty Senate President, and Kevin Gable, Faculty Senate President-Elect
From: Bill Bogley and Kerry Kincanon, Baccalaureate Core Committee Co-Chairs
Date: June 23, 2012
Re: BCC Support for Review of Writing in the Baccalaureate Core Report

On May 30, 2012 Dr. Susan Meyers forwarded Kate the final report of the Committee for the Review of Writing within the Baccalaureate Core. Dr. Meyers presented this information to the Baccalaureate Core Committee on May 21, 2012, and we speak for the entire BCC when we say we are most grateful for and impressed by the work of this review team. The BCC is supportive of the overall findings and recommendations of the report, which include matters that relate directly to the curricular authority of the Baccalaureate Core Committee and the Faculty Senate, but which also include reflections on issues that affect institutional priorities. Their findings and recommendations will be indispensable as our collective faculty seeks to strengthen the cumulative writing efforts embedded in our institutional core curriculum. To that end, the BCC endorses the report and itemizes the following items for near or long-term consideration by the BCC and the EC.

As noted in the report, the Core currently contains five separate components that specify writing as a required element. These include the Writing I, Writing II, WIC, and both Synthesis categories. Elements of the report of that fall within the continuing purview of the BCC include:

- Enhancement of the writing requirements within the Synthesis categories to ensure that students engage in a sustained writing effort; minimum word count, required drafting, feedback, revision.
- Focus on writing requirements in Synthesis category review and assessment.
- Update Writing II category criteria to ensure compatible outcomes across all category courses.
- Consider establishment of an information literacy component in the Core, either within an existing category or as a new and separate category.

Some recommendations extend well beyond the curricular authority of the BCC, but for which the BCC should be a strong voice.

- Institute a cap on Synthesis course enrollment to ensure feasibility of high-quality feedback on writing assignments.

Here is a brief summary of the BCC discussion following Dr. Meyers’ presentation.

- The discussion and recommendations regarding writing in Synthesis categories generated immediate conversation. The expectation that courses in the Synthesis categories incorporate writing is articulated in the category criteria and learning outcomes both for Contemporary Global Issues and Science, Technology, and Society. Our conversations this year around restarting the BCC Category Review have made us anecdotally aware that many units with existing Synthesis classes are challenged by this expectation, primarily due to size. There are Synthesis classes with well over 100 students, which means examinations and quizzes are often favored over writing assignments of length and substance. Indeed, the qualitative commentary included in the report from the faculty focus groups points to this dynamic as well. Because the BCC is embarking on the Synthesis
Category Review in the fall of 2012, it behooves our group to pay particular attention unit responses to how, if at all, the category learning outcome that involves writing is playing out in their course. Per the recommendation in the Review report, specific writing word/page counts and limits on class size may ultimately be in order.

- The BCC, through its existing responsibilities and processes and via any unique charges that come its way from the Executive Committee, should be an advocate for and a proponent of the “culture of writing” and a well-intentioned, cumulative writing experience in the five Bacc Core categories that specify a writing component. Executing recommendations – such as greater uniformity in Writing II offerings, transparency in WR II courses to help students and advisors make informed decisions of the best choice in this category, innovation in curriculum like the proposed “stretch model”, and faculty coordination and development surrounding the progressive nature of the writing experience in the core – is matter of getting the right experts on campus in the right places to impact change. The BCC seems poised to help facilitate getting those experts in the right places and advocating for the human and financial resources necessary to take on these recommendations.

- The bold suggestion of adding a mandatory information literacy course or category to the course merits further discussion and consideration. The mention of this idea by Dr. Meyers instigated a lively conversation amongst our group, and, in a short period of time, inspired other brainstorms of how the intent of the recommendation, improved information literacy and research skills, might be realized. Even if adding a class or category is not feasible at this time, keeping the idea on the table in the coming years may generate traction for other avenues to infuse information literacy skill development into the core.

Thanks to you and Executive Committee, both for convening the committee to examine Writing in the Baccalaureate Core and for your consideration of their findings. We’re optimistic that the report can serve as a foundation to improve OSU writing efforts and processes in the Bacc Core, not only to put us on par with peer institutions, but also to strengthen our overall undergraduate educational experience.