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3-1-90

Pat Bizzaro to make necessary changes, approved by the Faculty (2-20-90) Senate and send an updated copy to this office.

3-16-90

received updated copy - marked "original"

FINAL REPORT OF THE
FACULTY SENATE AD HOC COMMITTEE
ON WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

TO: Faculty Senate of East Carolina University
FROM: Ad Hoc Committee on Writing Across the Curriculum
DATE: 13 February 1990
RE: Final Report

The attached report reflects nearly four years of research and investigation into the problems in student writing at East Carolina University and into the best remedies for those problems. We offer this report in the belief that East Carolina University desperately needs a university-wide writing program. At the same time, we hope the report that follows reflects our deep respect for the integrity of each department and unit in the university and our hope that each will find a way to incorporate writing into its curriculum.

This report is respectfully submitted by the Faculty Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Writing Across the Curriculum, including its past and current membership:

Dr. Patrick Bizzaro, English, Director of Writing Across the Curriculum

Dr. Jo Allen, Director of the Writing Center, English
Dr. Genevieve Bartol, Nursing (past member)
Dr. John Carter, History (past member)
Dr. Robert Christian, Biology
Mr. Mark Coley, Medicine
Ms. Resa Crane-Rodger, English graduate student
Dr. Frances Daugherty, Art
Dr. Collett Dilworth, English
Mr. Jeff Eyeran, Student Government Association
Dr. Alton Finch, Technology (past member)
Dr. James W. Kirkland, English
Dr. Betty Levy, Education (past member)
Dr. John Longhill, Business (past member)
Dr. Richard Mauger, Geology
Dr. Nancy Mayberry, Foreign Languages and Literature
Dr. Richard McCarty, Philosophy
Dr. Richard Miller, Philosophy
Dr. Dorothy Muller, General College
Mr. Larry Neiman, Medicine (past member)
Ms. Pam Penland, Athletics
Dr. Roger Sharpe, Criminal Justice
Mr. Mel Stanforth, Art
Dr. Marion Sykes, University College
Dr. Steve Tacker, Psychology
Dr. Carol Thompson, Sociology and Anthropology
Dr. Robert Wendling, Leisure Systems Studies (past member)
Dr. Kenneth Wilburn, History
Dr. Tinsley Yarbrough, Political Science (past member)

FINAL REPORT OF THE FACULTY SENATE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

The Writing Problem

In April 1987, members of the Writing Center Steering Committee brought to the Senate's attention three disturbing facts:

- * Over a four-year period, nearly 40% of all incoming freshmen were unable to demonstrate minimal writing competencies in placement essays written prior to enrollment in English 1100: Freshman Composition;
- * In a survey, 82% of recent ECU graduates working at local businesses and industries indicated that they had not been instructed in writing since taking freshman composition; and
- * those same graduates spend 23% of their worktime writing and 17% reading the writing of others.

The Senate responded to this information by approving Resolution 87-12, which established the Ad Hoc Committee on Writing Across the Curriculum.

Responsibilities of the Ad Hoc Committee on Writing Across the Curriculum

The Senate developed the Ad Hoc Committee on Writing Across the Curriculum and charged it with the following four tasks:

- * to collect relevant information about research on writing
- * to study writing across the curriculum (hereafter WAC) programs in use at other institutions with student populations similar to the population at ECU

- * to analyze these findings and any other relevant data in light of the needs of ECU faculty and students
- * to make specific recommendations to the Senate for the development of a program in WAC so that the Senate can use the available information to decide if such a program can and should be instituted at East Carolina University

Findings of the Ad Hoc Committee on Writing Across the Curriculum

The Committee was divided into four subcommittees to satisfy the Senate's charges.

Research on Writing. One subcommittee set out to collect relevant information on research in writing. The subcommittee provided a working definition of what we mean by "writing across the curriculum": teachers' use of student writing in all disciplines as a means of (1) increasing learning and (2) improving students' writing ability. Numerous scholarly articles reported the success of writing as a means of helping students become better learners and on the value of employing writing to communicate learning in courses other than those offered by the Department of English.

WAC at Institutions Similar to ECU. A second subcommittee surveyed programs in WAC at nine institutions similar to East Carolina University. Each offers some systematic form of remediation, as we already do at ECU, and five of them run an active program in WAC administered through the Department of English, the Vice Chancellor's office, or through a General College structure. Seven of the nine programs offer writing-intensive courses (often in the students' majors), have a director for the program, and assign to a committee the task of approving or disapproving syllabuses for those courses. The biggest problem in instituting such a program seems to be maintaining faculty interest beyond the first or second year. Faculty need to be rewarded for obtaining new skills and for experimenting with the uses of writing-to-learn strategies.

Attitudes of ECU Faculty toward WAC. A third subcommittee surveyed faculty at ECU to determine their interest in a WAC program. On the whole, responses to the questionnaire suggest that the faculty recognizes a significant problem with student writing and is willing to address the problem directly, in their classrooms. Most would be willing to participate in such a program, at least initially, if provided appropriate time and student-teacher ratios.

Attitudes of ECU Students toward WAC. A fourth subcommittee surveyed students at ECU. Generally, students express a concern that the university should do more to help them develop their writing skills.

Pilot Studies

At its January 1989 meeting, the Ad Hoc Committee on Writing Across the Curriculum recommended to the Senate that pilot Studies of WAC be run to further examine the ways writing might be used in classrooms with ECU students. At that time, Acting Vice Chancellor Bloodworth provided the committee with enough funding to support four pilot studies, which have since been completed.

As announced in the October 1989 Senate meeting, the participants in the studies--Drs. Muller (General College), Wilburn (History), Sharpe (Criminal Justice), McCarty (Philosophy), and Thompson (Sociology and Anthropology)--incorporated writing into their teaching in an effort to find out how well writing works as a method for improving student learning and writing.

The results of those studies, lending support as we might have suspected to the well-documented successes of WAC programs across the country, suggest that teaching strategies involving the use of writing can be implemented with relative ease and will result in improvements in student writing and learning, depending on the kind of learning desired.

Conclusions

We can conclude from our four years' study that one method to attack the problem of poor writing and learning among students is by instituting a program in WAC. More specifically, we conclude the following:

1. that writing skills among many incoming ECU students are unsatisfactory
2. that writing skills among many graduating ECU students are unsatisfactory
3. that WAC is a method used nationally--including in various ways at each of the nine institutions identified by the WAC committee as being similar to ECU--to combat weak writing among students
4. that WAC has the additional benefit of helping students become better learners
5. that from all reports--published research as well as our own pilot studies--WAC works, provided classes are carefully designed to achieve the desired results
6. that from all reports, faculty, students, and administrators at ECU support a program in WAC
7. that any program should provide various options to faculty who choose to be involved; the more options available (including the option not to participate at all), the more popular the program
8. that incentives should be made available to reward faculty for learning new skills and experimenting with the use of writing in their classes; incentives will help combat attrition that has set in at other institutions using WAC
9. that, as a university program, WAC should be housed outside the English Department

10. that, eventually, the program must have a staff and a cross-disciplinary organizational structure
11. that workshops, conferences, and tutorial training sessions are excellent means for preparing faculty to use writing in their classes

Recommendations

The Ad Hoc Committee on Writing across the Curriculum recommends the following:

1. that the Senate support efforts to develop multi-disciplinary and multicultural initiatives, such as Writing Across the Curriculum
2. that the Senate recognize that incoming students at ECU lack the kinds of writing skills they will need both as students and, once graduated, as professionals
3. that the Senate support the principle that writing can and may be used in classes throughout the university to help students become better learners and improved writers
4. that the involvement of faculty in a WAC program be optional
5. that faculty who participate in a WAC program be justly rewarded for their efforts
6. that since WAC can include a variety of uses of writing, that any program present teachers with options for the way they might use writing in their classes and train them to employ those options
7. that WAC be developed by beginning with existing programs, such as the Writing Center, and with courses which currently use writing
8. that a support system for WAC be built as soon as possible into the Writing Center so that the program can begin as early as fall 1990
9. that a committee be appointed by the current Director of WAC to continue the task of developing WAC in cooperation with the office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, by completing the tasks identified on the attached timetable
10. that changes in student writing and learning as a product of WAC be studied over the next three years

11. that any changes in curriculums as a product of WAC be carried out through established committees
12. that WAC should be under the auspices of the office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Timetable for Developing Writing Across the Curriculum

I. Short-Term Goals

A. February 1990

1. Final report of the Faculty Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Writing Across the Curriculum
2. Dissolution of that committee
3. Development of Writing Across the Curriculum Task Force, to work with the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs in developing the program further

B. March - April 1990

1. Determination of financial support for further efforts in developing a WAC program
2. Survey of university to identify existing programs and courses employing writing; classify uses in terms of developed formats for dissemination and publicity purposes
3. Work with the Director of the Writing Center in developing and advertising a position for an Assistant Director of the Writing Center, responsible for designing and implementing a Writing Center-based program of support for WAC
4. Work with Committee to set up research studies of WAC for the 1990-91 academic year and to select participants for Research in 1990-91

C. May - June 1990

1. Fill the position of Assistant Director of the Writing Center
2. Publish list of Writing Advocates, based upon responses to solicitation done in March

3. Design Dissemination Program for 1990-91 school year
4. Design Training Program for Teaching Assistants to support WAC in the Writing Center

D. July - August 1990

1. Survey faculty Writing Advocates to determine how writing is used in their classes
2. Invite Writing Advocates to participate in the Dissemination Program
3. Plan, design and schedule dissemination workshops in WAC, employing Writing Advocates, under the guidance of the Director of WAC
4. Contact department and unit heads to schedule short presentations about WAC to all faculty in the university; the Director of WAC and one or two Writing Advocates should make these presentations as part of the Dissemination Program

II. Long-Range Timetable

A. 1990-91 academic year:

1. Develop a System of Incentives to reward faculty for participating in WAC
2. Begin Dissemination Program with Workshops and Departmental Visits
3. Begin Writing Center-based Support Program:
 - a. Identify departments interested in participating
 - b. Assign Graduate Assistants from such departments to the Writing Center for training
 - c. Implement program in spring of 1991

4. Continue research to determine how best to use WAC in the classroom
5. Plan statewide conference on WAC to be held at ECU fall 1991
6. Plan publication of papers from the conference and consider continuing publication of papers on WAC by Writing Advocates
7. Select participants for research in 1991-92

B. 1991-92 Academic Year:

1. Hold Statewide Conference on WAC
2. Run Workshops by Advocates
3. Consult with departments in developing systematic uses of writing such as new writing-intensive courses, writing tests for new majors, and other new uses of identified formats
4. Continue research projects
5. Develop administrative structure for WAC, as deemed necessary at the time (but probably to include a Director, Assistant Director, and Research Coordinator as well as a secretary)
6. Hire and house program administrators
7. Write and publish history of WAC at ECU
8. Write and publish guidelines for participating in the program
9. Dissolve Writing Across the Curriculum Task Force

10. Rename WAC as University Writing Program

11. Develop University Writing Program Committee of the
Faculty Senate

RESOLUTIONS OF THE FACULTY SENATE AD HOC COMMITTEE
ON WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

WHEREAS, the final report of the Faculty Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Writing Across the Curriculum concludes that a program in Writing Across the Curriculum will enable teachers to help students become better learners and improved writers, and

WHEREAS, that same committee recommends that steps be taken immediately to develop a university-wide program in Writing Across the Curriculum in cooperation with the office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Senate likewise recommends to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs the appointment of a Task Force, as outlined in the Final Report of the Faculty Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Writing Across the Curriculum, to work with the Vice Chancellor's office in developing a program in Writing Across the Curriculum by following the Timetable recommended in the Final Report.