WRITE TO THE TOP:
ENHANCING STUDENT WRITING THROUGH A WRITING INTENSIVE PROGRAM

Institutional Context

The University of North Carolina at Pembroke is one of the constituent institutions of the University of North Carolina. Begun as a normal school for the education of Native Americans, UNC Pembroke offers baccalaureate and master's degrees and serves an eleven-county region in south central and southeastern North Carolina. Robeson County, which is the county of origin for about one-third of the student body, is one of the most ethnically diverse counties in the nation and one of the poorest. Considered one of the most diverse institutions of higher education in the South, UNC Pembroke has a student body which is 16.5% American Indian, 28.8% African American, 42.1% White, 3.7% Hispanic, and 1.2% Asian.

Development and Rationale

The choice of writing as the topic of the QEP grew out of a lengthy and deliberative process, in which all UNCP faculty, as well as other key stakeholders, had the opportunity to offer input. Beginning in the fall 2007 semester, members of the QEP Steering Committee made presentations on the QEP to every department or school on campus All UNCP faculty had the opportunity to contribute ideas to the Steering Committee in five ways, including a paper survey, an online survey, a survey on the Blackboard Course Management System, e-mail messages to the Steering Committee, and contacting departmental liaisons. Faculty had the opportunity to prioritize the top three topics generated from the first survey. During a meeting of the departmental liaisons following this survey, the topic was narrowed to writing. Having completed this process, which lasted throughout the 2007—2008 academic year, the QEP Steering Committee ultimately determined that writing—a leading concern among UNCP faculty— should be the focus of the QEP.

Beginning in June 2008, the QEP Writing Committee, composed of a representative group of faculty from a variety of departments and disciplines, began meeting to develop the QEP. Meeting every two weeks from summer 2008 through spring 2010, the QEP Writing Committee dealt consecutively with the development of various components of the QEP. The Committee completed the remaining sections of the QEP in fall 2009 and met with student groups and academic departments to brief them on the development of the QEP.

Needs Assessment

Many studies demonstrate the importance of writing in academic success as well as the need for improvement in student writing. Employers and government officials also highlight the need for improved student writing.

Data show that students at UNCP also reflect the national trends in the need to improve student writing. Data from the QEP Student Perceptions of Writing Survey show that, despite this apparent need to improve writing, fifty-three percent (53%) of UNCP students estimate they never use the University Writing Center during a semester and twenty-four percent (24%) estimate they "rarely" use it. In addition, the QEP Faculty

Perceptions of Writing Survey finds that seventy-eight percent (78%) of faculty rarely or never require students to use the Center as part of an assignment.

The National Survey on Student Engagement shows that UNCP freshmen do more writing than freshmen at the University's peer institutions as well as at NSSE institutions as a whole. While UNCP freshman students write more on average, seniors write less than those at peer and other NSSE institutions. The number of writing assignments in most classes is very low and there is a tendency for some students to avoid courses requiring "a lot of writing." Data from the College Learning Assessment (CLA) provide some nuance regarding which aspect of writing may require special attention.

According to the QEP Faculty Perception of Student Writing Survey, eighty-seven percent (87%) of faculty believe that students should be able to write before taking upper level courses. Fifty-seven percent disagree that the freshmen writing course should supply students with all of their necessary writing skills. From the survey, 1) sixty-nine percent (69%) would like to see more writing intensive courses taught in their discipline; 2) fifty-seven percent (57%) would be willing to teach writing intensive courses in their discipline (at least given smaller enrollments in such courses); and 3) seventy-seven percent (77%) indicate a willingness to attend workshops on teaching writing in their discipline.

Literature Review

Research in the field of composition has evolved over the past twenty-five years from studies focusing on the composing process itself to studies about the quality of both the learning and the composing college-level writers are expected to demonstrate. Prominent scholars and pioneers in composition studies have published numerous articles and books whose titles illustrate the field's progression from writing-as-process to writing that demonstrates and situates knowledge *within* disciplinary contexts. If college teachers want their students to adopt the discourse practices of successful practitioners in their field, they must teach their students to recognize, evaluate, emulate, and practice the rhetorical strategies of the particular discourse communities they are invited or required to join. This new "post-process" era of composition studies must inform any forward-looking writing program.

First-year composition courses that focus on rhetoric and argument provide a foundation for strong, informed, "insider" writing in other specific disciplines. However, first-year composition courses cannot be regarded as "antidotes" to students' writing "deficiencies" but as an "introduction" to academic discourses, their purposes, audiences, genre conventions, and their uses in particular contexts (i.e., at particular times and places)—the beginning, not the end, of their development as writers. Students expect their teachers to deliver specialized knowledge they must master. Teachers expect their students to judge the competing claims to truth they encounter and to pursue knowledge in a range of disciplines while "finding their own voice" among them. Basic skills are not what matters most for successful writing in college—students can get those through tutoring and practice. What matters most is knowledge of and practice with the genre conventions operant within a discipline whose discourse students must master in order to demonstrate their learning and knowledge.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of the Quality Enhancement Plan is to enhance the ability of students to write effectively and appropriately in the discipline. The Quality Enhancement Plan will improve undergraduate student skills in both general writing and professional writing in their disciplines. General writing demonstrates critical thinking, style, and fluency appropriate to the audience and task; consistency in focus and reasoning; structural integrity; and mastery of standard edited English. Professional writing should also exhibit style and vocabulary appropriate to the discipline and task; synthesize research in writing appropriate to the discipline; and exhibit the ability to access, evaluate, and utilize information from a variety of sources and media.

The focus of the QEP on competent and professional writing skills reflects the need both for student competence in core courses and for knowledge of and proficiency in writing skills pertinent to individual disciplines. Students who complete Writing Enriched and Writing in the Discipline courses will improve their ability to employ program-specific writing as a mode of critical thinking and communication and will demonstrate better writing as compared to both internal control groups and students at similar institutions. Student learning outcomes for improving general writing skills and improving professional writing skills in academic disciplines encompass skills in four areas: rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and writing; processes; and knowledge of conventions.

QEP Initiatives

There are four initiatives to achieve the goals of the QEP. The first initiative is the Writing Intensive Program that is composed of a two--tiered program of course development. Tier One, Foundations for Intensive Writing, involves the Freshman Composition Sequence, English 1050 and 1060. The Plus-One Program provides at-risk and other students in ENG 1050 and 1060 an additional hour of contact time with a Composition instructor. To enhance the success of this program in achieving the student learning objectives embedded in the Quality Enhancement Plan, Tier I of Initiative One of the Plan is to continue and expand the Plus-One Program.

Tier Two of Initiative One is the Writing Intensive Program that involves requiring students to complete nine hours of Writing Enriched and Writing in the Discipline courses. Writing Enriched courses are courses within departments at the 200 to 400-level. These could include courses that satisfy General Education requirements. Writing in the Discipline course will be newly created inter-departmental courses (for example, "Writing in the Social Sciences" or "Writing in the Physical Sciences"). It is expected that students will take Writing Enriched courses in the sophomore or junior year and the Writing in the Discipline courses in the junior or senior year. Academic advising will focus on ensuring that students adhere to this sequencing.

The Initiative Two is the Faculty Development Plan. The Plan will provide faculty with training in the best practices for assigning and responding to student writing. Faculty teaching courses in the Writing Intensive Program will participate in faculty development activities, such as workshops, seminars, and presentations. Faculty teaching courses in the Writing Intensive Program will receive a stipend for developing writing intensive courses.

Workshops will feature peer-to- peer training and mentoring. They will use outside consultants as well as those on campus who have special expertise or who exhibit best practices in the teaching of writing. The impact of these faculty development sessions will be assessed in three major categories: knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the participating faculty.

Initiative Three of the Quality Enhancement Plan is to strengthen the University Writing Center. This will entail increasing the number of student tutors and recruiting student tutors from a variety of disciplines, developing a cadre of professional tutors who will train and mentor the disciplinary student tutors, and the development of an on-line tutoring service.

Initiative Four involves technology enhancement. The University will hire an instructional designer/technologist with a writing specialty or a background in writing instruction who will develop online resources using the enhanced features of Blackboard Enterprise Academic Suite and other applications including open source software. WCOnline, a scheduling, record-keeping, and reporting software with an Online Tutoring Module, will be purchased for use by the University Writing Center. Further, in order to assist with faculty evaluation of student writing, as well as tracking student writing performance, the University will purchase the Waypoint Outcomes Software. For faculty development, an online portal will be developed to allow for asynchronous training opportunities, recorded sessions, and additional materials for implementing and managing writing enhanced and writing in the disciplines courses.

Timeline for Implementation

The QEP begins in the Fall 2010 semester and continues through Spring 2015. From fall 2010 through spring 2015, the University will continue and expand the Plus-One Program. For the creation of Writing Enriched courses and Writing in the Discipline courses and implementing new course requirements, the QEP Director and the QEP Advisory Committee will begin the process of curriculum change in fall 2010. The Director and the Committee will meet with department chairs to identify courses to become Writing Enriched courses, existing Writing in the Discipline courses, and faculty to participate in faculty development activities. In the University Writing Center, student tutors will be employed and receive instruction in the tutoring of writing. Professional tutors will be recruited, the online tutoring service will be developed, and the WCOnline software will be purchased. For technology enhancement, the instructional technologist/designer will be recruited and hired, the WayPoint software will be purchased and the online portal for faculty development will be created.

In subsequent semesters, the QEP Director and the QEP Advisory Committee will complete the curriculum change process and work with faculty to develop Writing Enriched and Writing in the Discipline courses. Faculty development activities will begin in spring 2011. The first Writing Enriched courses will be offered in fall 2011, and the first new Writing in the Discipline courses will be offered in fall 2012. The first cohort of students to complete the new Writing Intensive course requirements will graduate in spring 2005. Faculty development activities; tutoring activities; and the use of the WCOnline software, WayPoint software, and online portal for faculty development will continue throughout the period from spring 2011 through spring 2015.

Administration

The QEP Director will have the ultimate responsibility for overseeing the implementation and assessment of the QEP. The QEP Director's responsibilities will include providing leadership for the development, planning, and implementation of the Quality Enhancement Plan; directing assessment processes for all aspects of the QEP; and organizing, facilitating, and evaluating faculty development activities. The QEP Director will be selected through a national search. The successful candidate will hold an earned doctorate and be qualified for an appointment to a faculty position in an academic department. The QEP Advisory Committee will conduct the search for the QEP Director. The QEP Director position will be located in the Office of Academic Affairs and report to the Senior Associate Provost for Academic Affairs.

The QEP Advisory Committee will provide support to the QEP Director. The QEP Advisory Committee will consist of representatives of a variety of academic departments. Under the direction of the QEP Director, the QEP Advisory Committee will be charged with assisting in the implementation, administration, assessment, and revision of the QEP. The QEP Advisory Committee will work with the QEP Director to identify and develop Writing Enriched courses and Writing in the Discipline courses and assist the Director in the design and implementation of faculty development activities. It will assist the QEP Director with the process of curriculum change for the creation of Writing Enriched courses and Writing in the Discipline courses and implementing new course requirements.

Resources

The University has committed sufficient resources in its financial plan to implement the initiatives outlined in the QEP over the next five academic years. The costs related to the QEP are as follows:

- Personnel Costs—Salaries and Fringe Benefits
- Consultants and Trainers
- Travel
- Office Equipment and Supplies
- Software and Instructional Supplies
- Promotional Expenses

The budget provides for an initial salary of $70,000 ($87,066 with fringe benefits) for the Director and $50,000 ($63,486 with fringe benefits) for the Instructional Designer/Technologist. An Administrative Assistant will also be hired at a salary of $25,000 ($34,011 with fringe benefits). Other staff positions to be funded include professional and student tutors in the amount of $75,000. Stipends of $500 apiece are provided for faculty to develop courses for the QEP for a total of $20,000 per year.

Funding is also designated for training and other learning opportunities for faculty. Fifteen thousand dollars per year will fund faculty development activities. Travel for faculty and the QEP Director is funded at an initial level of $12,000. To provide software and instructional supplies for the Writing Intensive Program, $13,600 will be set aside in the first year for the Waypoint Outcomes software, WCOnline software, and the CAAP or CLA writing assessment instruments. In summary, achieving QEP goals with respect to

student learning will require a five-year budget commitment of approximately $1.5m, with yearly costs ranging from $379,000 to $390,000.

Assessment

The purpose of the assessment process is to measure the degree to which the QEP is achieving its goals, especially its impact on the improvement of student writing. The assessment plan details the processes for evaluating the student learning outcomes outlined in the QEP. The plan contains relevant direct and indirect measures of student learning and measures outcomes at the initial and ending stages of the program. It uses both internal and external comparisons to assess the contribution of the QEP to student writing. The results of the assessment will be reviewed by the QEP Director and the QEP Advisory Committee and used to make modifications to the QEP as necessary. The results will be compiled in a report that will be submitted to the Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and disseminated to all relevant campus constituencies.