**Fall 2014
WAC Committee meeting
Thursday, September 18th 2014
2:00-4:00 GS 214B**

**Present** – Joy MClellen, Julia Mason, Dan Murtaugh, Jeff Galin, Julianne Curran, Fred Bloetscher
**Guest** – Mike Harris, Chair of Anthropology and Philosophy
**Absent** – Joe Su, Allen Smith, Rachel Luria

1. **Update on WEC**

**JG** told the committee about the Community Center for Excellence in Writing, even though it is a UCEW rather than WAC project.

**JG** explained the pilot program with the Languages, Linguistics, and Comparative Literatures department. The “M” faculty meetings will be this year. Currently data is being collected, and pending its completion, we will move forward.

Primary Goal: to get a sense of the process, its possibilities, and its limitations. Ideally 8-10 departments will express interest so that we can approach upper administration about working with two departments a year. The initial budget would be $100K, scaling up yearly.

The **committee** discussed garnering university support without competing with the Distinction Through Discovery/QEP initiative. **FB** emphasized marketing WEC as a support tool to QEP participants, since their process also deals with mapping the curriculum and articulating outcome goals. **JG** is interested in WEC supporting the QEP, but feels it is too soon after its launch to begin a partnership. He also noted differences in the QEP vs. WEC curriculum mapping processes. **JG** suggested talking with **FB** about the College of Engineering’s work with the QEP with the possibility of brainstorming support workshops, with the potential to work with Engineering and WEC next year.

**FB** raised the desire for research funds, which would require writing grant proposals. WEC might help a department build this process into its curriculum, perhaps involving students. Faculty would be responsible for writing actual grant proposals; students could participate in researching and reporting background material, contributing to the grant proposal. WEC could be presented as a tool to improve writing in order to hopefully garner research funds.

1. **Thesis hour courses/4970**

Thesis hour/4970 courses have appeared in the randomized WAC Assessment pool, but have not been included in the assessment. **JG** thinks they should be evaluated since theses are the pinnacle of writing projects. Several thesis courses were made WAC when the Honors College converted most of its classes to WAC. These courses were changed from one credit to three credits so that they might satisfy Gordon Rule, and the WAC committee accepted this.

The matter of how to handle thesis-hour courses also comes up with WAC faculty training and WAC’s re-certification of courses. The training requirement has not been enforced for the Honors College since it focuses on course design.

The **committee** discussed including these courses in the assessment process, and implications of this. The main implication would be training raters how to read it for its qualities without reading the entire document. **DM** suggested dividing a single thesis among raters, but this would be impacted by the randomized assignment to raters. **JG** said there’d be fewer “papers” per course, thus any theses in the assessment would represent a very small portion of the entire pool. **JM** suggested including a few theses in the assessment process to help determine if not requiring the Honors College faculty of thesis courses to participate in training is justified.

For re-certification, **the “general” thesis course syllabus that was approved for UUPC should be sufficient.** WAC will use the re-certification process to make sure that all honors faculty have a version of this for their thesis courses.

**JG needs to talk to Jeff Buller and Dean Pratt further on this matter to confirm whether these determinations by the committee are an appropriate matter of course.**

1. **TA training**

The **committee** reviewed minutes from 3-16-12 and 10-24-13 when the issue about initiating a university-wide mandate for TA training of students facilitating the teaching/grading of WAC courses was previously raised. **In 2012 the committee had voted to establish the requirement and drafting general guidelines, but these are still rough and have not been re-visited**.

The **committee** discussed the previous notes about TA training topics and what is needed. For example, adding some kind of statement about disciplinary writing characteristics. It also discussed whether to include a statement about grammar versus one about higher and lower orders of concerns. **JM** expressed concern about conflicts between training recommendations versus what instructors tell GTAs to do. **JG** reminded the committee that WAC would not necessarily be responsible for the training, but would offer guidelines and support.

**FB** reminded the **committee** that by requesting WAC-certification, the department agrees to uphold WAC-related elements, which and suggests department buy-in to WAC’s expectations. **JG** agreed, adding that even WAC-trained faculty may not always realize aspects of the course in the way things will impact a GTA.

The **committee** reviewed previously proposed criteria and determined that terms like “Commenting” need to be defined and the departmental expectations for such things explained to GTAs. Similar explanations would be needed for terms in a rubric. Departments would draft training proposals that determine the criteria for what students should produce and set outcome goals based on these and the WAC guidelines, which would then be submitted for approval.

**The outcome goals for a departmental-TA training should include addressing these minimum elements provided by WAC, plus additional goals that the departments determine.**

1. **Recertification**

The **committee** re-visited the issue of the PHI 2010 Introduction to Philosophy course and whether the syllabus satisfied WAC criteria. **DM** expressed concern about there not appearing to be required revision. The changes in the syllabus language seemed small, calling into question the WAC-compatibility with the course. **JG** pointed out that the course is necessary for the department, and so the chair will not want to de-certify the course.

**In preparation for the committee’s conversation with Mike Harris (interim chair of Philosophy), JG summarized four items to address:**

**1. Requiring mandatory revision for all students**

**2. Breaking the “7 elements” rubric into more than a 2-point/yes or no scale for more nuanced feedback**

**3. Supporting the overall quality of writing**

**4. Addressing both higher and lower orders of concerns in comments**

**Mike Harris (interim chair of Philosophy) joined the committee meeting.**

**MH** gave background information on the PHI 2010 faculty member, including their time at FAU.

In the time that the faculty member has been teaching PHI 2010, they developed a system in which students write up to thirteen 2-page assignments, the best ten of which are included in the students’ final grade. The faculty member’s decision to include the previous semester’s breakdown of percentages of students who achieved each final grade was intended to be fair warning about how grades would be determined in case a student challenged theirs.

**MH** conceded that until recently, much of the rubric was mechanical, and in light of last year’s WAC review, spoke to the faculty member about WAC’s concerns. The faculty member did not redesign their course, but did make a few changes to try to get at the committee’s concerns, which **MH** thinks a small accomplishment.

**DM** noted revision as an essential WAC element that hadn’t been addressed. The syllabus seems to say that if you have “perfect scores” on the minimum number of papers, then the student does not have to revise anything, and this is problematic. It is also unclear whether the note about papers not being graded based on “picky little details” means that sentence-level errors will not be addressed. **MH** clarified that the GTAs of the course are going to be instructed to make comments on both higher and lower orders of concerns, encompassing both substance and sentence-level grammar. However, the instructor does not want GTAs to become encumbered by grammatical details. **MH**  trusts the faculty’s word that graded work will have comments across the higher/lower ranges of concern.

**MH** and the faculty member spoke about considering adding another level (perhaps three levels instead of two) to the rubric to account for quality. One point can make a big difference in this course based on the grading structure. The meanings or descriptions of some of the grading criteria were changed to at least begin to account for the quality of writing. The rubric is no longer as mechanical.

**MH** expressed that he had not realized that some students could get out of WAC’s revision requirement and will be sure to address this with the faculty member. On behalf of the committee, **DM** asked for a forwarded, revised syllabus that reflects the matter of required revision for all students and clarifies that the inclusion of the required elements is not enough to make a paper sufficient.