April 10, 2017

Tyler Stovall
Dean of Humanities

Re: Provisional Proposal for Revised ELWR-C1-C2 curriculum

Dear Tyler,

Now that budgetary constraints and a roll-out timeline for the revised ELWR-C1-C2 curriculum have been clarified, and in response to a request from the Chair of the Academic Senate for a proposal and budget plan from Humanities/Writing Program, I am submitting the enclosed proposal for review. Though faculty input was solicited and discussion has been fruitful, the timeline for drafting this proposal did not permit an iterative design process or a faculty vote on the final draft. As such, this proposal should be considered to be provisional. Pending feedback, further discussion and a vote on a final proposal will follow.

The proposal itself does not forefront labor issues tied to pedagogical effectiveness. However, it cannot be denied that where writing instruction is concerned, labor and pedagogy are inextricably linked. The costliness of writing courses relates directly to the labor that writing teachers must provide in support of student learning, therefore making it impossible for us to view an increase in class sizes as a viable option. Student learning in the context of the writing classroom relies on expert teachers of writing (i.e., those professionalized in the field of Writing Studies) providing students with timely, individualized feedback over multiple drafts of each assigned essay. Because of this, it does not scale well.

UCSC Writing Program faculty already teach, on average, more students than other writing faculty in the UC system, and our class sizes exceed the caps suggested by the National Council of Teachers of English (20 students for a university-level writing course; 15 for courses that enroll students with greater need, such as our ELWR and MLC courses. See NCTE’s Principles for the Post-Secondary Teaching of Writing and Why Class Size Matters Today). Indeed, considering the impact of class size is not a luxury, as was recognized in UCOPE report, "Bringing Writing Class Size in the UC System in Line with National Standards." Though written in 2005, no results contradict their findings: when students are provided with appropriate educational support to improve their writing—something possible only with working conditions that permit that support—student success and student retention is higher.

During program discussions leading up to the version of the proposal submitted here, faculty repeatedly emphasized the need for ELWR-required domestic students—who disproportionately come from marginalized communities or under-resourced school, or are first-in-family to attend college—to continue to receive full academic support in their efforts to complete an undergraduate degree. ELWR courses, through a focus on language and literacy, help to acclimate students to university life and provide much-needed support through the individualized instruction that small classes afford.

In addition, as writing faculty, we know that the nearly all students enter the university as novices in academic discourse. Thus, as you consider the ELWR-C1-C2 curriculum with respect
to the budget, we urge you to consider also the educational needs of our seemingly more prepared students, such as those who enter the university as C1 and C2 ready. They, too, are in need of adequate preparation in writing, as is suggested by the numerous assessment studies conducted by the Writing Program in collaboration with other campus stakeholders.

This proposal consciously avoids the language of "first year curriculum," a term made popular on this campus by VPDUE Richard Hughey and the college provosts. The attractiveness of such a term is understandable, but its use obscures that fact that the Writing Program’s ELWR-C1-C2 curriculum has goals that are independent of College Core and that students have until the start of the 7th quarter to satisfy the C1 and C2 requirements. With the separation from College Core, this ELWR-C1-C2 curriculum is more appropriately conceived of as a two-year curriculum. A two-year curriculum opens up significant benefits for student success that are not available when constrained to the First Year Experience. For instance, a two-year curriculum frees up significant flexibility in scheduling, which may be essential for students pursuing STEM majors where there is little space and flexibility in their major planners, and benefits can likely be derived by students from taking Writing 2 (C2) in year two—that is, closer to the DC requirement.

Importantly, with the implementation of the new C1 and C2 outcomes, as well as (beginning fall 2018) a lower-division writing curriculum freed from the multiple outcomes expected of College Core, the Writing Program will find it easier to improve its curriculum in response to campus needs, broadly defined to include major programs, and advancements in writing pedagogy (the latter being related to our most recent external review).

Aside from noting reductions in courses or credit offerings made possible by the literacy work assumed to be part of College 1, this proposal remains silent on points of connection between the Writing Program's ELWR-C1-C2 curriculum and College Core. The plans described in this proposal do not require collaboration with the colleges, but neither do they prevent it should collaboration prove to be desirable and pedagogical sound. Such collaborations would best be attempted after both the Writing Program and the colleges have been able to implement and assess their respective learning outcomes after the 2018 roll-out.

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Shearer
Writing Program Chair

Cc:
Adrienne Harrell, Assistant Dean of Humanities
Meg Lehr, Academic Programs and SHR Analyst
Elizabeth Abrams, Chair of the Council of Provosts