To: William Ladusaw  
Dean of Humanities, UC, Santa Cruz

From: External Review Committee for the Writing Program  
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Date: March 4, 2014

Subject: UCSC Writing Program External Review Report

**Introduction**
We would like to thank UCSC for inviting us to participate in this review of the Writing Program. We are grateful to the Writing Program faculty who spent time composing an extensive self-study; to UCSC Senate and administrative committees for compiling thorough and carefully-crafted charge letters; and to the faculty, administrators, and staff with whom we met while on campus.

During our visit to UCSC on February 26-28, we met with campus administrators; Writing Program leadership and Senate faculty; Writing Program lecturers and graduate TAs; Writing Program staff; and college provosts and department chairs. Each of these meetings was exceptionally collegial and collaborative. We found eager contributors to discussion, audiences willing to listen to one another and engage in fruitful and respectful conversation, and a clear and compelling commitment to student learning. As visitors to UCSC, we are grateful for the warm and gracious welcome provided by each of these groups and for the Writing Program’s willingness to think in productive and challenging ways about how to best engage with the UCSC community writ large.

In pursuing our inquiry and developing this report, we attended to the charge provided by Dean Ladusaw and the supplemental questions provided the Committee on Education Policy and the Committee on Planning and Budget. Specifically, we considered:

- Quality, composition, morale, and future directions and leadership needs of the program’s academic staff;
- Curriculum, including the impacts of the C1, C2, and DC requirements on GE, collaboration between the Writing Program and colleges in delivering Core, the objectives of the program in comparison to other programs and the quality and rigor of the curriculum, and support for English Language Learners;
- Tutorial support, including the current structure of tutoring;
- The program’s assessment strategies, including assessment of C1 and C2 at programmatic and campus levels (including Stretch) and assessment of tutorial support, including assertions made regarding the effectiveness of workshops and tutorial support for academically vulnerable students and possible assessments for the DC requirement;
- Program administration, including administrative and governance procedures, effectiveness, and staffing; and
- Future goals of the program, including work with graduate students; the possibility for Program expansion (e.g., teaching intermediate or upper division courses or serving the campus more broadly).

The sections that follow provide our responses to these questions in the context of our overarching findings and related commendations and recommendations.
Commendations

Throughout our visit, we were consistently impressed with the commitment of those with whom we met to UCSC students and to the development of students’ learning. This commitment was especially visible among Writing Program faculty, whose primary focus on writing instruction provides a critical foundational experience for students. In this section of the report, we describe commendations on a number of elements that clearly emerged during our visit.

Academic Staff

We commend the program’s faculty and leadership for:

1. Commitment, passion, enthusiasm, spirit, and collegiality.
2. A dedicated faculty with a shared spirit of endeavor that is “happy to test what it knows.”
3. The faculty’s openness to sharing and discussing its practices and aspirations and its enthusiasm for engaging with new ideas and possibilities.
4. Clear concern with student success, including student retention and persistence.
5. Leadership that has stewarded the program with deep commitment.

The program benefits from a highly committed group of faculty who have the interests of UCSC students at heart. Writing Program faculty expressed a number of points of pride about the Program. There is an egalitarian spirit among all members of the Program; all feel that they are able to contribute to the growth and development of its direction. This spirit of collaboration also extends to their interactions with other campus stakeholders. For instance, the Program’s ability to facilitate the delivery of the Core/C1/C2 across the campus’ ten colleges is impressive. Indeed, one stakeholder expressed the sentiment that the Writing Program is “much beloved” on campus.

Program faculty are also committed to student learning as essential to student success. Faculty consistently identified the changed and changing composition of the undergraduate population – e.g., the increasing fraction that is first generation, EOP, multilingual, and international – as critical factors in their endeavors as a program, underscoring that successful completion of the campus’ formative writing courses are essential for students to persist and succeed at UCSC. Consistent with these needs, the faculty also clearly share a commitment to improvement that manifests in a willingness to listen to and learn from one another. The Program’s self-study refers to “brown bag” talks focusing on pedagogy that serve this purpose, and during our visit we also heard about nascent plans for an intra-program conference that would represent a next step in these discussions. The Program has also begun to pursue insights from colleagues external to the campus as a means for addressing emerging pedagogical and curricular challenges; in summer 2013 the program hosted a three day workshop by a UC Davis colleague to develop faculty skills in the instruction of multilingual writers.

Rightfully so, program leadership identify the faculty’s sense of shared stewardship, camaraderie, professional orientation, and openness to change as signature attributes of the Writing Program. The program’s leadership undoubtedly accounts for the number of faculty with long histories of teaching with the program and, as noted by new faculty, this shared sense of dedication is an important reason to join the program. The leadership faculty are to be commended for their commitment to and skill in cultivating this esprit de corps, as it has been key to the program’s success and will be essential to its continued evolution.

Curriculum
We commend the Program’s faculty and leadership for:

6. Their commitment to teaching writing as a process.
7. Contributing to and thinking about the ways in which the C1, C2, and DC courses can provide a basic structure for writing and communication to permeate the curriculum.
8. Providing attention to and support for graduate students to develop more thoughtful pedagogical practices.

Throughout our discussions with faculty, staff, and graduate students, we heard about the considerable time and energy the program’s faculty invests in ongoing development of its curriculum, especially as they perceive that curriculum to provide support for what they identify as important writing strategies and skills. The signature feature of curricula for each course, articulated by many with whom we spoke, was attention to process and helping students cultivate their own writing processes. This focus on process permeates the C1 and C2 courses, especially, forming a sort of thread that connects them through disparate curricular foci.

Faculty also were clearly engaged in thinking about how to use the structure of writing instruction already in place on campus to create a writing experience that runs throughout the curriculum. As they considered the core/C1 curriculum, Writing Program instructors have clearly thought about how best to meet the needs of all UCSC students, including incoming students whose experiences with writing in the American academy may be less robust than expected. The development of the Stretch curriculum for C1 and the creation of 22A and B were presented as innovations meant to address needs that faculty believe should be addressed in order to support students’ success as they move through the C1/C2/DC structure. Writing Program faculty are also eager to work with DC faculty to consider how best to support students as they move from the Program’s courses into DC courses in the majors.

Graduate students, finally, benefit from the focus on pedagogical development as they work in the Writing Program. While Program faculty and administrators explained that the number of graduate students able to teach in the Program is limited (by support from home departments or from fellowships), those that are able to teach explained the many ways in which participating in Writing 203 (the practicum course for new TAs) helped them to develop as teachers in a number of ways: helping them consider the ways in which writing facilitates learning; learning how to scaffold assignments; considering how to provide appropriate and helpful feedback; learning to work with reading in deliberate and purposeful ways; and even learning to design their own syllabi and assignments. Graduate students also clearly appreciated the careful mentoring provided by Program faculty, emphasizing the value of working with faculty to discuss the comments that they (the graduate instructors) put on student writing and of having their courses observed and receiving feedback. Graduate instructors also stressed that they felt their relationships with Writing Program faculty mentors to be exceptionally supportive and collegial and never judgmental, and they felt that they would take lessons learned from their work in the Program to their own teaching.

Leadership and Outreach

We commend the Program’s faculty and leadership for:

9. Cultivating relationships among faculty and administrators across the campus, including (but not limited to) the college provosts.
10. Their commitment to understanding and working with (and within) the larger goals of the institution, particularly in relation to student success.
The commitment of the Program and its faculty to cultivating relationships across the campus was evident in our discussions and is reflected in materials from the program’s self-study. These relationships have resulted in pedagogical innovations that have addressed student needs in a time of constrained resources, such as the library modules developed by instructors when the library became unable to provide orientation visits for writing courses. The program also discussed an emerging partnership with linguistics that will doubtless benefit incoming international students. Partnerships with other faculty, such as one with a faculty member in social sciences who designed and implemented an assessment for the program, have also been beneficial. This commitment to collaboration has also clearly served institutional structures beyond the classroom, as program Senate faculty serve in leadership positions in the divisional and system-wide Senates.

The relationship between the Writing Program and the “college system” was one that faculty singled out as especially successful. For Writing Program faculty, this relationship enabled them to work more closely with incoming students, making sure that they did not “fall through the cracks.” Moreover, the integration of C1 and Core has led to thoughtful discussions about writing among the college provosts. Provosts expressed clear appreciation for the Writing Program’s concern for students and their teaching in the Core courses and a desire to build stronger ties between Core and the Program (e.g., by combining tutoring efforts and support courses). Provosts also expressed a desire to support students, many of whom they perceive to be bringing to campus different writing preparation than previous student groups. The college provosts’ concerns, then, mirror those of the Program and attest to both groups’ investment in ensuring the success of entering students and to the Program’s alliances with the colleges.

We also commend the UCSC administration, especially the Division of Humanities, for demonstrated support for the Writing Program that is evident through a variety of structures ranging from funding mechanisms to enable the work of the Writing Program to authorizing new hires.

Finally, we would like to recognize Writing Program Manager, Pamela Edwards, for her role in stewarding the program through thorough, insightful attention to the program’s needs including but not limited to student advising, course scheduling, fiscal management, and the acquisition of institutional data for assessment purposes. In particular, she shares in delivery of the program’s vision through administrative support explicitly intended to allow faculty to spend their time and energy on what they do best, which is to teach writing.

**Recommendations**

From our external vantage point, the Writing Program seems positioned to serve UCSC in unique ways. Program faculty, faculty from outside the program, and administrators alike noted that UCSC is at a pivotal moment -- emerging from a challenging time associated with budget cuts, grappling with changes in student populations, and encountering different opportunities and challenges associated with teaching and learning. Our recommendations are situated within the context of these broader changes and are designed to assist the Writing Program in mobilizing its current resources and strengthening connections to the rest of the campus. It is important to emphasize that we see these recommendations as ones that can help the Program build on existing strengths outlined in the commendations above. Additionally, we want to stress that working toward these recommendations will require the cooperation of multiple units and cannot be the responsibility of the Writing Program alone. To that end, we recommend that the program do the following:

1. **Develop a theoretical understanding of writing as a field of study that is clearly articulated and runs throughout the program.**
The Writing Program faculty’s commitment to process as a signature feature of their courses was emphasized throughout our discussions with them. Certainly, helping students to develop successful processes for writing is an important part of any writing course. However, this attention to process is distinct from an understanding of writing as a discipline and a subject of study. Especially given the wealth of opportunities and possibilities for the program’s work on the UCSC campus, articulating a theoretical understanding of writing as a field of study and using that understanding to inform the full scope of the Program’s efforts are critical.

As students enter UCSC, they are in essence entering a number of different -- and, often, distinct -- communities. These communities have particular ways of asking questions, pursuing research to investigate those questions, and, especially, representing responses. For students to navigate successfully among and between these communities, they must be able to ask questions central to this navigation: about what writing looks like, what kind of evidence is used, how evidence is used, how knowledge is conveyed through written (or other) forms, what shape those forms take (e.g., what structures are used, what styles are reflected in writing, even how work is cited), and so on. Students must then draw on their existing strategies or develop new ones to make decisions about meeting the expectations for writing in and among these communities.

Absent a theoretical basis that fosters students’ abilities to ask (and act on) these questions, students often default to prior knowledge and experiences with writing, research, and representation. The application of this prior knowledge can lead to writing that seems “sub-par” -- because it reflects unsophisticated analysis, inadequate uses of evidence, and even inattention to surface conventions like punctuation and mechanics. Moreover, instructors sometimes then target instruction to issues that are symptomatic of this larger challenge without addressing the challenge itself. Yet, this prior knowledge is based on experiences with different (earlier) contexts for learning -- in the case of UCSC frosh, most likely high school courses. To foster a successful transition to learning in college contexts, then, the Writing Program must develop a theory of writing that is reflected in the outcomes, content, and pedagogy in C1 and C2 courses that engages students in this important study within the context of UCSC.

A research-based theory of writing that includes attention to the trajectory of writing development can also provide a framework through which Writing Program faculty can conceptualize their courses and describe the ways in which they provide developmentally appropriate outcomes and curriculum for students. With the C1, C2, and DC requirements, UCSC has demonstrated its commitment to the important research-based principle that writing instruction is a responsibility shared across the curriculum. As the unit responsible for providing instruction at the foundational or entry level, program faculty can draw on a theory of writing to shape outcomes and curriculum in the C1 and C2 courses that speak to what students should know and be able to do after an introduction to writing in the university. This introduction encompasses a number of domains -- affective domains like persistence and responsibility; cognitive domains related to analytical abilities; and cultural domains associated with adapting to university contexts.

A robust theory of writing can also help the Writing Program to engage with and help shape conversations about writing with other faculty teaching DC courses. These faculty represent other disciplinary communities (outside of writing, which constitutes its own disciplinary community) that students will enter; such faculty have distinct expectations for writing within their own communities. Extending from a theory of writing, program faculty can engage in discussions with DC faculty geared toward making explicit those expectations for students, as well as thinking about how the use of writing can help students to achieve those expectations.
Working from a theory of writing might also significantly inform a research-based examination of the C1 and C2 curriculum. In our discussion with college provosts, we learned that they are deeply interested in the intersection of C1 and the Core course and interested in how to exploit that connection most effectively. To capitalize on this interest and the program’s interest in providing the most effective writing instruction possible for incoming UCSC frosh, the program might begin to investigate how to create a shared basis of understanding about how the research-based goals of C1 and Core courses can fruitfully overlap and complement one another. To create a shared basis of understanding, the program might pilot a study with one college. This study might convene Core writing faculty, who would read a shared article about writing and genre study. Participants might then consider how they can design assignments and activities through the Core course that can inform students’ abilities to learn about and apply understandings of the study of writing and genre in the Core course.

A similar workshop approach for Composition 2 might begin by interrogating the relation of writing, rhetoric, and the study of genre to research-based genres. How are genres and, by extension, research-based writing, rhetorical? Moreover, how do approaches to research vary across the academy, and what is the relationship between research and the presentation of data, findings, and interpretation in different genres? Such an approach can articulate with the DC and help to inform campus wide discussions about the alignment between the DC and the C1/C2 courses.

A more carefully articulated research-based approach to the study of writing, whether or not supported by workshops such as those described here, can also inform a reexamination of the outcomes for C1 and C2 courses. The current student learning outcomes for these courses include analysis of rhetorical situations. They emphasize that students will “learn… to understand that different purposes and contexts call for different strategies, different conventions, and different techniques” and point to the use of appropriate purposes and strategies. At the same time, it was challenging for us to understand how the curriculum seems to support these outcomes. We heard discussions about how writing supported or was linked to work in “content” courses (implying that writing is not a content); the C2 courses, which are themed around any “content” the instructor chooses, also seem to reflect this perspective. The student writing that we were provided as part of the self-study materials and the description of the qualities of these papers that were written as part of a norming study within the program (also included in the self-study) also suggest that C1 and C2 courses extend from the idea that there are generic “skills” associated with writing (such as developing an analysis, using evidence, or using correct syntax and mechanics) that can be cultivated through attention to “any subject.”

Yet, research both in Writing Studies and in the broader area of transfer of learning has long demonstrated that generic constructions of writing that seem to be reflected in this approach are highly problematic, detracting from the cultivation of critical abilities to analyze expectations for analyzing ideas about what analysis means, how evidence is used, and even what “correct” syntax looks like in specific communities, specific academic disciplines or, beyond the academy, in workplaces or community sites.

We intend for this suggestion that the faculty develop a theory of writing as one that can foster the future direction of the Program. We hold the commitment and dedication of the Program’s faculty to student success in the highest regard. However, both the self-study materials and conversations throughout our visit highlighted the multiple challenges that the program feels it is facing in conjunction with changing student populations and students’ changing experiences with writing and reading. A theory of writing, learning and development will enable program faculty to situate understandings of and discussions about these changes in a broader context informed by research in writing studies, including (especially) research on writing and transfer of learning. It also will enable faculty to identify a strategic vision that can guide efforts to address these changes. We believe it is crucial for this vision to begin with
the construction of outcomes and curricula that speak to a research-based conceptualizations of writing and development that can then be meaningfully assessed.

2. Assess student learning appropriately in coordination with other units on campus.

The program has identified a number of potential needs for student learning and support -- at undergraduate and graduate levels -- and directions in which the program might go. At the same time, they have also made a series of decisions about curriculum, approaches, staffing, and planning without the benefit of empirical data on student learning outcomes and/or institutional data on demography, experience, and other factors that influence student success and persistence.

The Writing Program needs both to develop its own assessment questions and protocols as well as have greater access to institutional data; these must be rooted in and extend from a research-based theory of writing that suffuses the program and its efforts. Assessment questions based on a theory of writing and a clear articulation of student outcomes will lead to data collection that is meaningful and actionable. For instance, the campus provosts question the efficacy of increased access to student tutors, one of the actions taken by both the WP and the provosts to facilitate student success in writing. But does such increased access have the intended impact? Appropriate assessment would help determine the most effective allocation of resources and gesture toward better use of tutorial services—which otherwise run the risk of proliferating across campus. Also, while there is evidence that the Stretch courses are successful at Arizona State (where they were originated) and in early versions at UCSC, assessment is needed to evaluate questions about the courses and about tutoring as a means of supporting the development of student writing at UCSC. Better assessment will also allow the program to move from overreliance on the AWPE as a data point -- and one that is intended only as a means of placing students in courses, not assessing them once they have been placed -- toward richer, more valid, and more meaningful sources of information about student writing and learning that are locally contextualized.

We congratulate the campus for seeking a LSOE with specialization in assessment, but one person will not be successful in developing and carrying out studies to gather data necessary for the program to make strategic and informed decisions about the number of writing-related initiatives on the campus -- questions about tutoring and Stretch and about the effectiveness of C1 and C2 courses more broadly, in addition to other questions. Integral to the program’s assessment efforts will be the development of the campus’ infrastructure for assessment. This will include the articulation of intended learning outcomes for the Disciplinary Communication requirement. It will also include ensuring appropriate access to the student information necessary to disaggregate learning results and track student success over time. Finally, it will include development of the campus’ infrastructure for sharing assessment practices and data. The Senate and the VPDUE may be instrumental in such information gathering and dissemination. These broader institutional innovations and collaborations will create pathways for connecting the Writing Program to the institution’s larger commitment to development of students’ communication skills, disciplinary or otherwise.

3. Be both strategic and tactical about activities.

We commend the program’s caring and concerned faculty. At the same time, we also perceive a faculty that rightly sees itself to be stretched thinly, and which seems to want to stretch itself even more thinly. In order to achieve the greatest effect(s) on the campus’ culture of writing, the program must decide where, when, and how to invest its efforts. Only then can it go about strategically approaching the issues it identifies as ones to which it would like to contribute. Such strategizing will certainly mean that some
areas of need may not be directly addressed; however, since writing is a campus-wide responsibility, the program cannot shoulder that responsibility for the entire campus.

4. Consider how best to contribute to the education of international students.

The writing program’s expertise should be in the study and practice of writing. Currently, the program is hiring one LSOE with ESL expertise. However, there seems to be significant expertise in working with second-language writers in the linguistics department, and we encourage the Writing Program and the campus to turn to that group, both in order to create a strategy for working with these students and for delineating what the Writing Program might be able to feasibly contribute to these efforts. Such cross-unit collaborations will strengthen the campus’ commitment to the teaching of writing while also generating more local knowledge about writing and writing students.

5. Keep approaches to graduate education within reach.

The program’s dedication to education was also evident in its work with the graduate student instructors (GSI). Participants in this program reported that Writing 203 prepared them well for classroom instruction. They felt the course provided useful resources and created a community that is interested in teaching and that continues to support their work as they implement their courses. As one put it, 203 provided a “feel for how [the Writing Program] wants W2 to be taught.” Among the many activities of 203, students highlighted as particularly valuable the mentoring relationships with C2 instructors (which are ongoing), the syllabus development assignment, and the opportunity to observe instruction of a C2 course. All agreed that their abilities to anticipate students’ needs and development over an offering of C2 would have benefitted from the inclusion in 203 of an opportunity to observe the progress of a single C2 course at several points over the quarter. GSIs also reported that their efforts to provide constructive, focused feedback on student writing would benefit from a more refined description of what students should leave W2 able to do. Finally, GSIs seem hungry for opportunities to share ideas for classroom instructional activities, and identified several potential mechanisms to facilitate this exchange, including through a simple Google Doc arrangement.

The program expressed interest in extending its work with graduate students in two directions: 1) developing a graduate certificate program in writing pedagogy that builds on the C2 experience described above, and 2) providing dissertation writing support to graduate students in partnership with the graduate division. The ERC recognizes that both of these activities will benefit graduate students and UCSC in important ways. However, we encourage the program to attend first to articulating a theory of writing and a vision for the program’s role in advancing this work in a larger campus context.

6. Recruit appropriate research faculty and leadership.

It is hard to imagine accomplishing all of these goals – developing a theoretical understanding of writing, creating meaningful assessment, choosing appropriate and tactical interventions in the creation of a writing culture at UCSC – without the hiring of research faculty in writing studies. Professorial faculty engaged in research will connect the work of the WP with knowledge production and best practices in the field and provide a framework for cultivating and directing local research and assessment activities. Such professional development of LSOEs and Unit 18 lecturers will be crucial for the WP’s future growth and success.
The campus faces many options for the recruitment of such faculty. Given that the Writing Program is currently a free-standing, “independent” unit in the Humanities Division, we would recommend the hiring of a tenured (associate or full) professor of writing studies housed in Humanities, who would work collaboratively with the Dean of Humanities and the VPDUE to develop a vision for writing studies at UCSC and then coordinate both assessment of existing courses and outreach to other disciplines in tracing out an appropriate trajectory for students’ understanding of writing. A junior research faculty member could complement the work of the senior member while also working more closely with LSOEs and lecturers in developing more specific student learning outcomes and robust assessment.

Conclusion: Next Steps

These recommendations are broad and strategic, speaking to both the theoretical foundation of the Writing Program and its orientation toward specific activities (from strategic planning to curriculum development and instruction) that will require a medium- to long-term process of implementation if adopted. In conjunction with any medium- to long-term activities and in support of them, we also recommend the following short-term actions:

1. Given the recommendation to develop and articulate a theory of writing that underscores the program’s courses, we strongly recommend extending the program’s growing commitment to professional development by including attendance at and greater participation in national conferences such as the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference, or Computers and Writing.

2. Given the program’s interest in assessment and the campus’ need for data, we recommend actively participating in assessment workshops. The Council of Writing Program Administrators’ annual meeting always includes a pre-conference assessment workshop; the CWPA also runs a three-day workshop for writing program directors and faculty that includes significant attention to assessment and development of assessments situated within specific campus cultures.

3. Given the Program’s interest in making connections with faculty teaching DC courses, we recommend bringing in a writing expert with whom to collaborate on compiling a strategic plan for this work. This plan should include the development of an overarching theory of writing as a discipline, the development of a set of data-gathering strategies, consideration of tools for use in this data gathering (such as interview or focus group questions), development of strategies for data analysis, and consideration of strategies for implementation of the results of the data gathering, as well as plans to assess the results of these efforts.

We hope that the audience for this review -- the Writing Program, campus administrators, committees, and other stakeholders -- will consider these suggestions not as critique of UCSC’s approach to writing instruction, but instead as focused guidance for both streamlining the prodigious energy and commitment of the Program’s talented faculty. These suggestions are geared toward more effectively mobilizing existing resources – both personnel and material – to enhance students’ understanding of what writing is and does in the world. Developing students’ knowledge about writing will enable them to be more effective writers. Developing faculty’s knowledge about writing will enable them to more clearly work across the range of writing opportunities at UCSC to more effectively incorporate and support writing development at all levels.