

## WAC CURRICULUM INNOVATION COMMITTEE PROPOSAL FOR A STRENGTHENED WRITING CENTER

(WAC CIC members: Gabrielle Regney, Karen D'Amato, Laura Kirsch, Roberta Kosberg, Jeff Lemberg, Joan McNeill, Bill Nancarrow, Kara Provost, Mary Ryan, Karrie Szatek, with regular participation from Rob MacDougall and Cassandra Horii)

### OVERVIEW:

A strong Writing Center can function as an intersection for writing within disciplines (WID) and across the curriculum (WAC), sponsor faculty development related to writing, and both support and elevate student writing. As part of an effective overall academic program, Writing Centers can have a very positive "domino effect" by improving students' academic confidence and performance, reducing the number of students on academic probation, improving retention, and improving students' satisfaction and success by helping them prepare for life beyond Curry (graduate school, jobs, etc.). An enhanced Writing Center would support more comprehensive writing development and promote writing excellence at Curry across different disciplines and levels, from first year to Grad/CE. As a site for writing excellence, Writing Centers can elevate writing from developmental through advanced levels through initiatives such as tutoring for writing related to any courses or career/graduate school endeavors; expanded peer tutoring opportunities for excellent student writers; workshops on academic and creative writing; and centralizing physical and online writing resources.

### RATIONALE:

**Strategic Planning:** A more comprehensive Writing Center dovetails with the four strategic directions identified for the College in the March 2012 Strategic Plan document:

- Offer distinctive, relevant and rigorous academic programs of quality
- Attract, educate, and graduate students prepared to engage in a complex and changing world
- Strengthen a culture of organizational integrity, accountability, and sustainability
- Foster an inclusive campus community that attracts, respects, and supports diversity in multiple forms

**Supporting Writing in and Beyond the Classroom:** As noted by the International Writing Centers Association, often "teachers cannot...provide opportunities for the extended, on-going collaborative discussion, questioning, and practice" which typically occurs in Writing Centers. Expert writing tutors can "provide non-evaluative, immediate oral feedback; attend only to that student's questions; and engage with the student in...active planning, drafting, or revising" ("Writing Center Concept").

- **Gen. Ed:** An expanded Writing Center will also provide key support for the strengthened expectations for reading and writing expressed in the current Gen. Ed. proposal.
- **WAC, WID, and Faculty Development:** Many faculty across departments have expressed the need for more effective and consistent instruction in writing across the curriculum and within the majors, particularly beyond the first year, as well as additional assistance for faculty to achieve this. **An enhanced Writing Center can help the College work toward a more integrated, cross-disciplinary and cross-level writing program that partners with faculty and courses in AE, English, and other departments to address the needs of all students at Curry. Many Writing Centers also act as resources for faculty to continue developing effective strategies for teaching and assessing writing.**

### **Admissions Competitiveness:**

Our match-mates, such as Emerson, Endicott, Regis, UMASS, etc., have robust Writing Centers with more appropriate space, staffing, and resources (see links at end of this document). A strong Writing Center can enhance admission and retention efforts by providing a comprehensive hub for writing support and excellence prospective students and parents can see when comparing our resources with those of our competitors.

### Student Need:

- **Writing Excellence:** As we seek to attract and retain academically stronger students, the Writing Center can engage students with interest and ability in writing through employing peer writing tutors; participating in the spring Academic Forum; sponsoring creative writing readings and workshops; potentially serving as a home for the Curry Arts Journal; and other initiatives.
- **Supporting Developing Writers:** while a strong Writing Center must not be a site for remediation only, there is a particular need for writing support at Curry, as suggested by data from student demographics and writing assessment projects in AE and English over the past six years. Compared to their college-bound peers, the majority of Curry students enter college without college-level verbal skills as measured by the SAT:

FALL 2011 First-year student data	Avg Verbal SAT score & percentile rank	Avg Writing SAT score & percentile rank
New Curry students placing into AE 1060 (21% of incoming students)	408 (aprox. 17 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	393 (aprox. 18 <sup>th</sup> percentile)
New Curry students placing into ENG 1280 (74% of incoming students)	463 (aprox. 37 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	469 (aprox. 44 <sup>th</sup> percentile)
All US high school seniors taking SAT	497 (50 <sup>th</sup> percentile)	489 (50 <sup>th</sup> percentile)

(College Board)

Many colleges and universities place students scoring below about 500 on the Verbal SAT into a developmental writing course (Doughty and Nerney). About 23% of incoming Curry students had a Verbal SAT score above 500; about 25% had a Writing score above 500 (keep in mind about 10% did not submit SAT scores—many of them PAL students, which would have likely lowered the average SAT Verbal and Writing Scores if they had submitted them). By this benchmark, roughly 75% of our students would qualify as developmental writers based on SAT scores.

### NEXT STEPS

- Present proposal to chairs/directors/coordinators and get feedback
- Complete additional research on models, best practices, and budgeting through WAC cic and present to wider faculty/administration
- Karrie and Kara explore possible grants for seed money—work with Diane Gifford
- Create a plan to phase in development of enhanced Writing Center and submit through academic budget process and strategic planning groups.

### RESOURCES

#### International Writing Centers Association

"The International Writing Centers Association, a National Council of Teachers of English affiliate founded in 1983, fosters the development of writing center directors, tutors, and staff by sponsoring meetings, publications, and other professional activities; by encouraging scholarship connected to writing center-related fields; and by providing an international forum for writing center concerns" (<http://writingcenters.org/about/>).

See particularly: Writing Center Concept, <http://writingcenters.org/resources/writing-center-concept/> and Resources, <http://writingcenters.org/resources/>, which includes:

- [Starting a Writing Center](#)
- [Join the Wcenter Listserv](#)
- [Resources for Writers](#)
- [Peer Tutoring](#)
- [Peer Writing Tutor Alumni Research Project](#)
- [Peer Tutoring and Writing Center Courses](#)
- [Bibliography of Resources](#)
- [Writing Center Concept](#)
- [Writing Centers in Professional Contexts](#)
- [What Lies Ahead for Writing Centers](#)
- [Two-Year College Writing Centers](#)
- [International Writing Centers Week](#)
- [K-12 Writing Centers](#)
- [Writing Center Directory](#)

### Sites from some of our match-mates

- [Regis College](http://www.regiscollege.edu/undergraduate_programs/writing_center.cfm) [http://www.regiscollege.edu/undergraduate\\_programs/writing\\_center.cfm](http://www.regiscollege.edu/undergraduate_programs/writing_center.cfm)
- [Endicott College](http://www.endicott.edu/Academics/AcadResources/WritingCtr-AcadResources.aspx) <http://www.endicott.edu/Academics/AcadResources/WritingCtr-AcadResources.aspx>
- [St. Anselm College](http://www.anselm.edu/Current-Students/Academic-Resources/Academic-Resource-Center.htm) <http://www.anselm.edu/Current-Students/Academic-Resources/Academic-Resource-Center.htm>
- [Bridgewater State](http://www.bridgew.edu/writingstudio/) <http://www.bridgew.edu/writingstudio/>
- [URI](http://www.uri.edu/artsci/writing/center/index.shtml) <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/writing/center/index.shtml>
- [Emerson](http://www.emerson.edu/academics/academic-services/writing-academic-resource-center) <http://www.emerson.edu/academics/academic-services/writing-academic-resource-center>
- [UMass Boston](http://www.umb.edu/academics/vpass/academic_support/tutoring/rwssc/) [http://www.umb.edu/academics/vpass/academic\\_support/tutoring/rwssc/](http://www.umb.edu/academics/vpass/academic_support/tutoring/rwssc/)

### WORKS CITED

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Doughty, MaryEllen and Nerney, Margaret. "Do They Have the 'Write' Stuff? College Readiness in Writing." Action-Research Wiki, U of ME-Farmington MEd program. April 15, 2011. Web. Feb 2012 <http://action-research.umf.wikispaces.com/file/view/Doughty+Nerney+2011.pdf>.

Harris, Muriel. International Writing Centers Association, "Writing Center Concept." September 1988. Web. Accessed Feb 2012. <http://writingcenters.org/resources/writing-center-concept/>