



**TO:** Mike Mahon  
President and Vice Chancellor

**DATE:** July 3, 2019

**FROM:** Alan Siaroff  
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

**RE:** Academic Writing Program Academic Quality Assurance Review

In accordance with the U of L *Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Process*, the Academic Quality Assurance Committee approved the review of the Academic Writing Program at its June 25, 2019 meeting.

The Self Study Committee for this review comprised Natasha Rebry (Program Review Coordinator), Rebekah Eckert, and Rebecca Carruthers Den Hoed.

The review produced four documents:<sup>1</sup>

1. Self Study Report. Written by the Self Study Committee. Received March 8, 2019.
2. External Review Report. Written by Janet Giltrow (UBC) and Jaqueline McLeod Rogers (University of Winnipeg), based on a site visit on April 4-5, 2019 and received April 17, 2019.
3. Program Response. Written by the Self Study Committee. Received May 16, 2019.
4. Dean's Response. Written by Craig Cooper, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science. Received June 4, 2019.

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<sup>1</sup> All documents are available upon request.

## ***Self Study Report***

The Self Study Report asked for External Reviewer feedback on several areas:

- The potential for growing the program by connecting it to a larger academic unit, such as the School of Liberal Education, the Department of English, or the Library.
- Developing Writing 5850/7850 as a permanent course offering, developing other graduate writing supports, and revising curricula to enrich program offerings.
- Accessing university resources to maintain and develop the Writing Centre.
- Improving work conditions and offering new hires compelling reasons to stay with the program.

The body of the report noted several strengths of the Academic Writing Program:

- There are high retention rates for the student users of the Writing Centre.
- The program aligns well with the U of L strategic plan and academic plan.
- The program is committed to small class sizes.
- Program faculty meet regularly to discuss teaching and evaluation.
- The program is committed to the First Nations Transition Program.
- Instructors report timely access to supplies needed to teach Writing 1000.
- A student survey found that a majority of respondents report satisfaction with Writing 1000 and their instructors.
- The central location in the Library provides good access for students from all faculties/schools.
- Many of the program's instructors keep an active research profile.

The following weaknesses and challenges were mentioned in the body of the report:

- Writing cannot be a major or a minor for students and this limits course offerings.
- Writing 1000 attempts to cover ground that at other universities is spread across multiple courses.
- From 2007 to 2017, more students registered for an account with the Writing Centre than received an appointment.
- The Academic Writing Program is a program and not a department, which limits opportunities to liaise with the broader university community.
- The small size of the program limits course offerings.
- Some instructors report limited academic freedom to develop Writing 1000 in ways that reflect their pedagogy.
- Instructors report limited opportunities for advancement in the program and a lack of rewarding work.
- Instructors report a lack of community within the program and within the university.
- There is a high number of withdrawals from the Writing 1000 course.

Recommendations from the body of the report:

- Revisit Writing 1000 and develop more sustainable pedagogical goals and learning outcomes for a standalone course.
- Expand the number of dedicated instructors in the Writing Centre.
- Nurture the program as a respected academic program instead of a service unit.
- Nurture a stable core of permanent faculty and instructors who feel the program: builds a strong workplace community; protects instructor freedoms; offers instructors opportunities to contribute to curriculum and program development; and recognizes and values the expertise and work needed to develop and deliver the courses.

## **External Review Report**

The External Review Report contained six recommendations for improving the academic writing program:

1. **Academic Writing Program faculty should hold a one-day retreat by August 2019 to develop a statement of program outcomes.** --- This will give context for revising the curriculum and for future hiring. The outcomes should state the intellectual and practical goals specific to the program.
2. **Renew and revise the Academic Writing Program curriculum:**
  - 2a. **Reconfigure research from chosen topic and sources, to a community of inquiry and first hand research experience.** --- There should be a range of types of research experiences. For example, research in the instructor's area of specialty, research into local history or local change, or research using publications from other disciplines on campus.
  - 2b. **Diversify the writing assignments and reduce the length of the final paper or project.** --- Include proposals, calls for papers, abstracts, reviews of published research, PowerPoint presentations, consent forms.
  - 2c. **Include reported speech (the reporting of someone's words which can alter the tense, word order, and pronouns).**
  - 2d. **Replace grammar units with an introduction to the ideologies of language.** --- Give students an overview of folk attitudes towards language by reading and discussing excerpts from accounts of the ideologies of language.
3. **Implement the proposal to integrate writing studies into the graduate program.**
4. **Renew practices in the Writing Centre.** --- For example, protocols for interacting with students, and tutor training.
  - 4a. **Develop outcomes statements for Writing Centre activities.** --- These outcomes should be for the students who visit the Writing Centre and for what the Writing Centre contributes to the institution.
  - 4b. **Develop a course on writing in the research disciplines.**
5. **Develop a plan for providing professional leadership in the Academic Writing Program.** --- A tenure track faculty hire to provide professionally-informed, disciplinary leadership.
6. **Keep the Academic Writing Program within the Faculty of Arts and Science as a standalone unit.**

Recommendations from the body of the report:

- Temporarily assign management responsibility for the program to a senior administrator from Arts and Sciences.
- Expand tutoring and tutor training. House the Tutoring Centre in a larger room that allows several simultaneous tutoring sessions. Look into recruiting graduates of Writing 1000 as tutors. Consider offering Training in Tutoring as a 2000-level course.
- Continue offering the graduate student course but in a non-graded form that is offered over two terms. The course should allow for work on the thesis project and class time for discussing disciplinary and generic differences.
- Pilot one section of a 2000-level writing course that is designed for students who are interested in writing studies at an enriched level.
- New hires should be made at the professor rank.
- If the program stays in Arts and Science, move the Tutoring Centre from the Library to be near the faculty offices.
- Consider hiring students to administer the Tutoring Centre and ensure the centre has regular opening hours.



#### Challenges discussed in the report:

- Faculty need to identify more ways for the Academic Writing Program to be integrated into the broader institutional community.
- There are tensions among instructors who feel there is a two-tier system, where their teaching load is heavier than that of a faculty member in the program.
- Writing 1000 needs revision.

#### Opportunities discussed in the report:

- More students will continue in the Academic Writing Program beyond the first year if there are improvements to curriculum, a greater availability of tutors, and more students as peer tutors.
- Revise the curriculum to make Writing 1000 less remedial in focus and more about fostering interest in the scholarly process.
- A larger Writing Centre with more peer tutors can help build a community of students who are interested in writing and research practice.
- Faculty should be encouraged to join scholarly associations and travel to writing-related conferences.

### **Program Response**

In their Program Response, the Self Study Committee addressed the recommendations from the External Review Report:

1. <i>Academic Writing Program faculty should hold a one-day retreat by August 2019 to develop a statement of program outcomes.</i>	Agreed. The Academic Writing Program will hold a retreat in 2019 and will conduct a genre mapping project in 2020. The genre mapping will determine what genres of writing assignments are used across the U of L. Data from the genre mapping will be used in curriculum revision.
2. <i>Renew and revise the Academic Writing Program curriculum.</i>	Agreed. The goal of the curriculum will remain to emphasize academic writing as research writing that emerges from and is shaped by academic research practices. There should be a greater diversification of writing assignments, and assignments should be aligned with the program outcomes.
3. <i>Implement the proposal to integrate writing studies into the graduate program.</i>	The Academic Writing Program will work with the School of Graduate Studies to explore the development of effective writing support for graduate students.
4. <i>Renew practices in the Writing Centre.</i>	The Academic Writing Program will discuss Writing Centre practices and outcomes as part of the retreat to develop program outcomes. The Academic Writing Program will explore the recommendation to develop a course on writing in the research disciplines (recommendation 4b).

5. <i>Develop a plan for providing professional leadership in the Academic Writing Program.</i>	Agreed. The Academic Writing Program's structure needs regularizing. All faculty, including instructors, should have a role in selecting program leadership. An additional tenure track faculty position would help boost the effectiveness of the program.
6. <i>Keep the Academic Writing Program within the Faculty of Arts and Science as a standalone unit.</i>	Agreed. The Academic Writing Program benefits from a close working relationship with the office of the Dean of Arts and Science.

### Dean's Response


The Dean of Arts and Science responded to the six recommendations from the External Review Report:

1. <i>Academic Writing Program faculty should hold a one-day retreat by August 2019 to develop a statement of program outcomes.</i>	Agreed. Program outcomes will clarify the practical and intellectual goals of the Academic Writing Program and will help guide curriculum revision. A genre mapping project will also help curriculum reform.
2. <i>Renew and revise the Academic Writing Program curriculum.</i>	Agreed. Faculty members need to renew learning outcomes for their courses and diversify writing assignments and assessment tools.
3. <i>Implement the proposal to integrate writing studies into the graduate program.</i>	Implementing this recommendation will be challenging. The Academic Writing Program should work with the School of Graduate Studies to develop effective writing support for graduate students.
4. <i>Renew practices in the Writing Centre.</i>	The Academic Writing Program should discuss Writing Centre practices and outcomes as part of the discussion of program outcomes generally. The curriculum review should explore the development of a training course for writing tutors, and the development of 2000-level courses.
5. <i>Develop a plan for providing professional leadership in the Academic Writing Program.</i>	Agreed. Fiscal challenges will make it very difficult to add a tenure-track hire to the program.
6. <i>Keep the Academic Writing Program within the Faculty of Arts and Science as a standalone unit.</i>	Agreed. The program functions like an academic department within the faculty. There is a need to regularize the appointment of the Program Coordinator.

The Dean also supported moving the Writing Centre closer to the Faculty of Arts and Science, and the renovation of University Hall may provide an opportunity to do this.

The Academic Quality Assurance Committee is satisfied that the Academic Writing Program academic quality assurance review has followed the U of L's academic quality assurance process appropriately, and acknowledges the successful completion of the review.

Sincerely,



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Alan Siaroff

Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

Cc: Andrew Hakin, Provost and Vice President (Academic)