Valparaiso
University

Student Writing
Task Force Report

Prepared by
The Task Force on Student Writing

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objective 1.3 of Valparaiso University's Strategic Plan calls for graduating students "who can investigate and interpret information and who can communicate effectively within and across cultures in relevant media, and through current technologies." Further, Action 1.3.1 of the Plan requires the University to "institute measures to ensure the quality of its students' writing skills." Pursuant to these objectives, the Provost convened a Student Writing Task Force in October, 2010. Its charge included: 1. Identifying measures that will ensure the quality of Valpo students' writing skills. 2. Designing and recommending a specific plan for implementing these measures. 3. Including assessment means within the plan not only for student writing but for evaluating the effectiveness of the plan itself.

BACKGROUND AND FINDINGS

Two basic findings emerged from a student writing assessment completed in 2010 by Valpo's Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) that were especially relevant to the work of the Task Force. First, an examination of self-reported Valpo student responses from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) revealed that beyond their freshman year, few of our students were required to submit multiple drafts of papers. Papers in excess of twenty pages were very rare; most were fewer than ten pages, often fewer than five. The OIRA's study confirmed the NSSE self-reported data using student papers collected from seniors throughout AY 2009-10: short papers were the norm for students in the 21 majors represented in the study, and few assignments required multiple drafts, especially those with ten or more pages.

The second relevant finding is that the OIRA study could not document a significant difference in the quality of writing between second-semester Valpo freshmen and Valpo seniors. In multiple blind evaluations of both senior and freshman writing, both groups scored an average of 4.2 (4.0 being "adequate") on a 6 point standard Educational Testing Service rubric. The mean, median, and mode of both groups were identical. These data gave no evidence of improvement in the quality of student writing between the end of the freshman and senior years. Particularly unsettling is that the findings of Valpo's own study are consistent with those indicating a nationwide lack of intellectual rigor presented by Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa in their recently published book *Academically Adrift*.

Valparaiso University presently lacks a coherent, comprehensive writing program for its undergraduates. As part of its general education requirements, the University does require its student to complete either the Freshman Core Program or the Christ College Freshman Program, and both these two-semester courses require a significant amount of student writing. After that, the amount and type of writing required of a student is a function of his or her major(s) and minor(s).

Although the University has many individuals who are quite skilled as writing teachers, none have primary credentials in rhetoric and composition. This is a rather glaring and somewhat embarrassing deficiency when one begins to discuss designing and implementing measures to enhance student writing.

Valpo offers programs in professional writing, technical writing, and in TESOL. Yet, with the exception of the minor in TESOL, the faculty who deliver these programs are experienced and effective teachers, but they lack formal credentials or degrees in the fields. Among other things, this lack makes delivering seminar-level courses in technical or business writing or lending highly specialized technical writing assistance to students in, for example, the College of Engineering very difficult.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The Task Force strongly recommends the creation of a university-level Writing Director position. This person should be a composition and rhetoric specialist with experience in writing curriculum design, classroom pedagogy, and teacher training. The Writing Director, along with the Core Program Director, will report to the General Education Officer (Assistant/Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs). The Director of the Writing Center will then report to the university's Writing Director rather than to the Dean of Library Services.

Similarly, the Task Force recommends tenure-track faculty positions with these writing specialties:
- One credentialed technical writing specialist, preferably with some engineering background or significant experience.
- One credentialed business writing specialist, preferably with experience in business, industry, non-profit, or government service.
- Two tenure-track faculty positions that include significant expertise and experience in Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). These are necessary due to anticipated increases in the number of international students, many of whom will be graduate students. (We already have one such individual in place and another who has the credentials but lacks a tenure-track appointment.)

The Task Force recommends curricular requirements generally in keeping with the *proven* best practices of the Writing in the Disciplines (WID) movement but appropriately adapted to fit Valpo's mission, character, curriculum, and organization. Thus, the Task Force recommends that undergraduates complete a writing program with this basic curricular progression:
1. Completion of the Core or the Christ College Freshman Program.
2. Completion of at least one writing intensive general education course. The intent here is to help maintain a student's writing proficiency if there is a gap in time between freshman-level intensive writing instruction and a specific WID transition course in the student's major. For some students, there will be little or no time gap; however, the Task Force recommends this be a requirement for all students in that it will give them additional writing practice in a rudimentary, discipline-specific context much more so than that encountered in their first-year experience.
3. Completion of a WID transition course typically in the sophomore or junior year.
4. Completion of a capstone course or requirement in the major with a significant writing component.

None of the measures recommended in this progression necessarily require the addition of new courses to the existing curriculum. In most cases, existing courses will meet, or can be modified and sequenced to meet, these requirements.

The Task Force also recommends the following basic measures to ensure the quality of student writing:

- Cap enrollment in writing and writing intensive courses to sixteen to twenty-four students; appropriately limit the course load of instructors teaching writing intensive courses.
- Adopt the basic assessment objectives and measures outlined in detail in the Task Force's report.
- Institute a writing placement exam for incoming undergraduates who are not native English speakers.
- As part of a course requirement, most likely in the Core or CC Freshman Program, institute some form of writing proficiency exam for all undergraduates.

Student Writing Task Force Report

I. Introduction

A. Mission of the Task Force

Objective 1.3 of Valparaiso University's Strategic Plan calls for graduating students "who can investigate and interpret information and who can communicate effectively within and across cultures in relevant media, and through current technologies." Further, Action 1.3.1 of the Plan requires the University to "institute measures to ensure the quality of its students' writing skills." Pursuant to these objectives, the Provost convened a Student Writing Task Force in October, 2010. The formal charge of the Writing Task Force included, but was not necessarily limited to:

1. Identifying measures that will ensure the quality of Valpo students' writing skills (in accordance with Strategic Plan Objective 1.3 and Action 1.3.1).

2. Designing and recommending a specific plan for implementing these measures.

3. Including assessment means within the plan not only for student writing but for evaluating the effectiveness of the plan itself.

B. Composition of the Task Force

The Task Force was composed of various University staff and faculty members who have both demonstrated a commitment to student writing effectiveness and could competently represent the interests of the major academic constituencies at Valpo. Members included:

- Mike Owens, Assistant Provost for Faculty Affairs and General Education Officer (Chair)
- Jon Kilpinen, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
- Edward Upton (fall semester), Lecturer in Humanities, and Margaret Franson (spring semester), Associate Dean, Christ College
- Michael McCuddy (fall semester), Morgal Chair of Christian Business Ethics, and Elizabeth Gingerich (spring semester), Associate Professor of Business Law, College of Business
- John Schemmel, Visiting Associate Professor of Civil Engineering, College of Engineering
- Carole Pepa (spring semester), Professor of Nursing, College of Nursing
- Susan Stuart, Professor of Law, School of Law
- Edward Uehling, Professor of English, Chair, Department of English

- John Ruff, Associate Professor of English and Director of the Freshman Core Program
- Lynn Grantz, Instructor in English (TESOL)
- Cynthia Rutz, Director, Teaching Resource Center
- Greg Stinson, Director of Institutional Research and Assessment
- Joyce Hicks, Director of the Writing Center

C. General Timeline

The Task Force met on a weekly or bi-weekly basis for Academic Year (AY) 2010-11, concluding its formal meetings in mid-May, 2011. The Task Force began by collecting information regarding the University's current practices concerning student writing (that is, where we are) and then engaged in extensive research to determine proven *best* practices (as opposed to simply common practices or bright ideas) concerning overall program and curricular design at the college and university levels. These efforts formed the foundation for the rest of the Task Force's work as the members then began to think through adapting proven best practices along with initiatives of the Task Force's own design to Valpo's mission, character, curricula, and academic organization.

D. Organization of the Report

This report begins with an explanation of the University's current situation regarding student writing. The report then presents the most basic research findings by the Task Force. Due to the symbiotic nature of the Task Force's dual charges of both identifying effective measures to promote and develop better student writing skills as well as recommending a general plan for implementing them, this report merges both items and presents them in section III entitled **"Findings, Recommendations, and Plans for Measures to Ensure the Quality of Student Writing."** Recommendations regarding assessment of student writing appear in section IV, entitled simply "Assessment."

II. Background Information and Current Situation

In April, 2009, the Faculty Senate of Valparaiso University adopted a set of ten basic University Student Learning Objectives (USLOs). Three of these are directly associated with student writing. They are:

- USLO 3. Students will become active learners by finding, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information.
- USLO 4. Students will demonstrate the ability to build logical and persuasive arguments, case reports, and /or responses.
- USLO 5. Students will communicate clearly and effectively in both oral and written forms.

One year later, the Senate also adopted a set of SLOs for the general education curriculum. Rather than generate a new and redundant set of objectives, the faculty simply adopted appropriate general education SLOs from the University objectives – along with two SLOs specific to general education – and assigned responsibility for accomplishing these objectives to appropriate departments and programs (see **Appendix 1**). As one would expect, responsibility for writing-related SLOs, particularly USLO 4 and USLO 5, falls primarily in the purview of the Core Program, the humanities, and the social sciences. As the University's Strategic Plan was finalized in 2010, these three USLOs were essentially conflated into Strategic Plan Objective 1.3 and regarded as a fundamental underpinning of the Plan's first major strategic goal of delivering "a compelling and distinctive educational model."

In late 2010, the Faculty Senate's Committee on Assessment along with its General Education Committee jointly developed a university-level general education assessment plan that was put into effect in March, 2011. Among other features, this plan requires departments and programs responsible for writing-related USLOs to begin assessing them no later than January, 2012. While far from providing something akin to a writing program for undergraduates, these measures do begin providing some assurances of quality in achieving writing-related learning objectives.

Valparaiso University presently lacks a coherent and comprehensive writing program for its undergraduates. As part of its general education requirements, the University does require its student to complete either the Freshman Core Program or the Christ College Freshman Program, both two-semester courses that require a significant amount of student writing. Periodically, students must meet with instructors individually to discuss their writing skills. Core requires submission of multiple drafts so students receive instructor feedback before a formal writing project is finalized. Core also makes extensive use of peer editing and a writing portfolio system.

Christ College's Freshman Program requires extensive instructor comments on weekly student papers, a plenary talk on writing after the students have completed their first major assignment, in-class writing workshops, and two Sunday afternoon writing help sessions for students who desire additional assistance.

It is also noteworthy that the University offers the services of a well-established Writing Center. The Graduate Tutoring Lab adjacent to the University's Writing Center also has graduate students (four, currently) who act as writing tutors specifically for graduate students, an arrangement that is proving quite effective.

Beyond these freshman requirements, students may encounter few or no writing intensive courses. The College of Business requires all its majors to complete English 300/502, Introduction to Professional Writing, as part of its general education curriculum. The College of Engineering (COE), which also formerly required certain majors to take English 300, has discontinued the requirement due to credit hour demands required elsewhere for accreditation. The COE now delegates writing instruction to the discretion of each of its three departments and relies on its own faculty to cover technical writing

topics. It is noteworthy that a major component of the mandatory senior engineering design project is a written report.

Of course there are many majors and programs of study, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, which require extensive writing assignments. And, there are often very deliberate efforts within these curricula to advance students' writing skills as they progress towards a degree. However, beyond the fledgling general education assessment plan, what is lacking is a campus-wide infrastructure or system for assuring that graduates meet Objective 1.3 of the Strategic Plan.

In the summer of 2010, the University's Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) completed a one-year study to assess the writing skills of undergraduates. This study began in early 2009 as a project for the Higher Learning Commission's Academy on Assessment and Student Learning. The project was part of a four-year commitment to improve assessment practices on campus in the wake of the North Central Association's accreditation visit to campus in April, 2008. (The OIRA's summary report is attached in **Appendix 2**.)

Two basic findings that emerged from this study were especially relevant to the work of the Task Force. First, an examination of self-reported Valpo student responses from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) revealed that beyond their freshman year, few of our students were required to submit multiple drafts of papers. Papers in excess of twenty pages were very rare; most papers were fewer than ten pages, often fewer than five. The OIRA's study confirmed the NSSE self-reported data using student papers collected from seniors throughout AY 2009-10: short papers were the norm for students in the 21 majors represented in the study, and few assignments required multiple drafts, especially those with ten or more pages.

The second relevant finding is that the OIRA study could not document a significant difference in the quality of writing between second-semester Valpo freshmen and Valpo seniors. In multiple blind evaluations of both senior and freshman writing, both groups scored an average of 4.2 (4.0 being "adequate") on a 6 point standard Educational Testing Service rubric. The mean, median, and mode of both groups were identical. These data gave no evidence of improvement in the quality of student writing between the end of the freshman and senior years.

In late 2010, Richard Arum of New York University and Josipa Roksa of the University of Virginia published *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*, a book that has had, and continues to have, a dramatic impact on conversations concerning academic quality and rigor on college campuses. While Arum and Roksa present many disturbing findings about a nationwide lack of intellectual rigor, what is particularly unsettling is that the findings of Valpo's own study of student writing are consistent with those in *Academically Adrift*.   Arum and Roksa found that 45 percent of students they examined "did not demonstrate any significant improvement in learning" over the first two years of college and 36 percent "did not demonstrate any significant improvement in learning" over four years as measured by the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA),

which measures competencies such as critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and written communication. While the CLA measures more than simply writing ability, the Valpo study of student writing certainly highlighted a similar lack of improvement. One of Arum and Roksa's most significant findings, as repeatedly emphasized by the national media, is that large numbers of students complete courses that do not require substantial reading or writing assignments. Fifty percent of students reported that they took five or fewer courses that required a total of twenty pages of writing for the entire course and 20 percent reported that they had taken five or fewer courses requiring more than twenty pages of reading per week. Again, the Valpo study found similar results once a student has completed his or her freshman year here. Hence, we would do well not to have one of the most widespread reactions to *Academically Adrift*; namely, "Oh, that's terrible, but that's not us."

During AY 2010-2011, the University conducted an extensive program review of the Freshman Core Program. Based on an internal self-study as well as an evaluation by a team of external reviewers, the Core Program Director has been asked to develop a plan for accomplishing several short-term actions directly related to student writing in the Core by December, 2011(see **Appendix 3**). These include:

- In conjunction with the Core Syllabus Committee, significantly reduce the amount of assigned reading to a level that both allows for more depth during class discussion and allows more time for writing instruction and activities.
- Increase process-based writing instruction and emphasis on academic argumentation.
- Ensure that the assessment plan for Core is fully implemented and appropriate follow-up is conducted. Submit the plan for review by the University's General Education and Assessment committees as called for in the memo dated February 17, 2011, from the Chair of the General Education Committee and the General Education Officer (see **Appendix 1**).

The Core Program Director has already begun taking appropriate measures at the time of this report. It will be important for the Provost to keep the principal findings of the Core program review in mind when considering the recommendations offered by the Task Force in this report. Many of the recommendations in this report would directly affect the quality of writing instruction in the Core. While some short term actions are already underway, the Core review should not be forgotten when considering the long-term vision for enhancing the quality of student writing.

III. Findings, Recommendations, and Plans for Measures to Ensure the Quality of Student Writing

Three quintessential solutions to academic issues that university ad-hoc committees, working groups, and task forces everywhere typically propose are "throw money at it," "add a faculty/staff position," or "add a course." The Student Writing Task Force was

not eager to adopt or recommend these perennial favorites; nonetheless, we do feel that some of them are necessary for the actions we are recommending to be effective.

Based on its research, the Task Force is not proposing a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program similar to what became very popular in the 1980s and on into the early 2000s. These have primarily been administrator-identified and driven programs often depending almost exclusively on the efforts of the WAC director or coordinator at an institution. At their worst, such programs attempted to make everyone responsible for student writing, which, in the end, often meant no one was responsible, and they sometimes allowed English departments so inclined to abandon responsibility for what some departments saw as the burdensome chore of teaching lower-level writing classes. However, many of the recommendations from the Task Force have been heavily influenced by successful elements of WAC programs. The Task Force found that many classroom techniques and pedagogies, particularly the "Writing to Learn" practices that bolster student learning of discipline-specific material by writing about it, can be quite helpful in improving student writing, learning, and overall engagement. We would expect that training our faculty in particularly successful pedagogies coming out of the Writing Across the Curriculum movement would result from implementing the recommendations that we do advance in this report.

The Task Force is recommending the creation of a program much more in keeping with the best practices of the Writing in the Disciplines (WID) movement but appropriately adapted to fit Valpo's mission, character, curriculum, and organization. Like WAC, WID views writing fundamentals and a coherent curriculum as central concerns across the university; however, as Jonathan Moore from Cornell University explains, "WID emphasizes disciplinary differences" and ultimately "what remains incommensurable and irreducible in writing practices both within academic fields and from one field to the next." In contrast to WAC, WID places primary responsibility for writing "with individual faculty situated in particular fields."

In many ways, a formal model of WID practice in action already exists at the Valpo School of Law. Given whatever basic writing proficiency its students enter with, the School of Law then requires ten credit hours in legal writing and research. In the first year, students are divided into small groups that enable the writing professors to work closely with each student. Similarly, in the second year, students work in very small sections in a legal writing course chosen from a menu of specific sub-specialty courses. The third year course includes a major piece of academic writing typically a seminar paper that is a capstone-type writing experience. Beyond the ten required hours, students have the opportunity to hone their writing skills under faculty supervision in the Law Clinic, by participation in one of several externships, through independent research projects, and, in conjunction with other students, through Law Review, Moot Court, and student competitions.
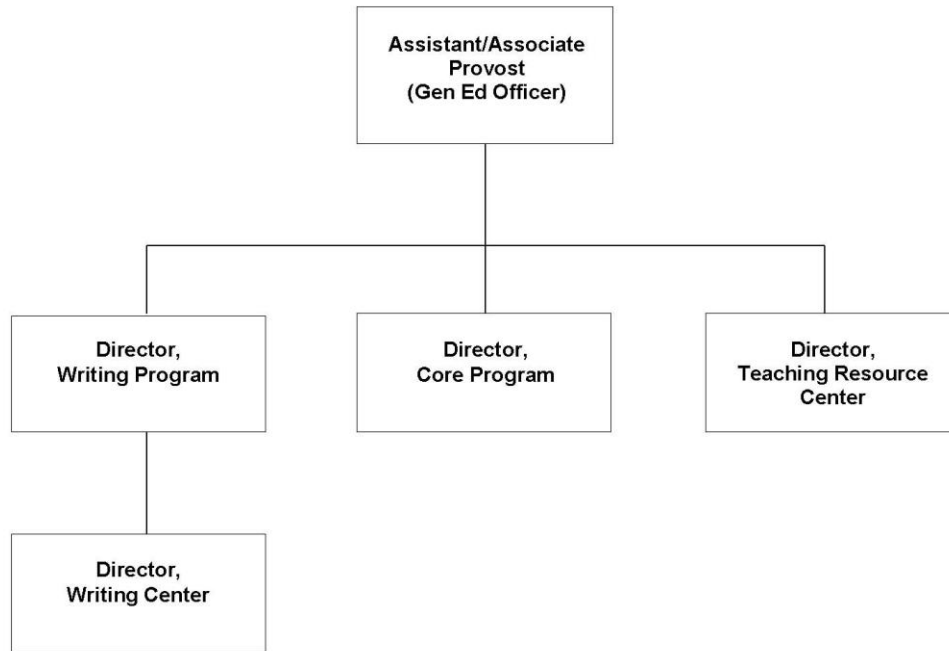
A. Faculty Recommendation

Though the University has many individuals who are quite skilled as writing teachers, we have none whose primary credentials are in rhetoric and composition. This is a rather glaring and somewhat embarrassing deficiency when one begins to discuss designing and implementing measures to enhance student writing. For this and other reasons, the Task Force recommends the creation of a university-level Writing Director position. This person should be a composition and rhetoric specialist with experience in writing curriculum design, classroom pedagogy, and teacher training. The Director's most basic duties should be to help design, implement, and oversee a writing instruction program across the University. He or she should be responsible for implementing and overseeing recommendations that the University decides to adopt from this report. The Director should also work closely with the Core Program Director regarding writing instruction within the Core and, also extremely important, training of Core instructors in teaching writing. This not only benefits the Core course and its students, but those teachers will take these skills back to other courses they teach and thus help to further increase the quality of writing instruction across the campus. This position should report directly to the General Education Officer (the Assistant/Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs). The Writing Director should also be the supervisor for the Director of the Writing Center rather than the Dean of Library Services, as is our current arrangement. The Writing Director position should be a full-time, tenure track appointment. For purposes of tenure and promotion, this person should be administratively housed in the Department of English where he or she would also have some teaching responsibilities, probably no more than two courses a year.

Additionally, this arrangement would have both the Writing Director and the Core Program Director under the oversight of the General Education Officer, who should ensure that the two work closely to coordinate writing instruction, both for students and teachers in the Core program. This should also help ensure that the Core program is appropriately resourced, institutional priorities are clear to both directors, and any conflicts between the two directors are appropriately resolved. It's also worth noting that the Director of the Teaching Resource Center reports directly to the General Education Officer and is the Provost's chief resource for organizing and delivering collective faculty professional development measures, especially those related to teaching. Hence, this organizational structure greatly facilitates delivering writing-related workshops, discussion groups, training sessions, and other related functions to the faculty.

Creating such a position would also set in place the fundamental organizational infrastructure necessary in the event that Valpo ever decides to create a post-doctoral writing fellows program. Such a program could prove an attractive supplement or alternative to hiring adjunct faculty for the Freshman Core program. The Writing Task Force did not take this issue up in any detail, however, because costs involved in establishing and sustaining a post-doc program are so high (most likely from a grant

for program start-up), and because the Task Force felt there were more immediate priorities that needed to be addressed first. The following diagram illustrates the recommended organization:

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                    │ Assistant/Associate │
                    │      Provost        │
                    │  (Gen Ed Officer)   │
                    └─────────────────────┘
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          │                    │                    │
  ┌───────────────┐   ┌───────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────┐
  │   Director,   │   │   Director,   │   │     Director,       │
  │Writing Program│   │ Core Program  │   │ Teaching Resource   │
  │               │   │               │   │      Center         │
  └───────────────┘   └───────────────┘   └─────────────────────┘
          │
  ┌───────────────┐
  │   Director,   │
  │Writing Center │
  └───────────────┘
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One aspect of creating the Writing Director position that the Task Force wanted to avoid entirely is this: as mentioned earlier in the WAC discussion, many schools have positions with titles such as "Writing Program Director" (frequently some variation of "Writing Across the Curriculum" will be in the title), and it is not unusual for the director to also oversee a writing center-type of operation. A frequent downfall of such arrangements, however, is that they will often be "a resource for faculty and students to take advantage of," and, as such, like a set of encyclopedias, though they are full of good information and expertise, will spend most of their time sitting around waiting to be consulted. Rather than recommend such an arrangement, the Task Force was intent on a structure that puts the Writing Director's operation in a position that ensures both students and faculty will encounter and benefit from his or her expertise. Hence, the Task Force makes the recommendations that follow concerning implementing a university-wide writing program.

B.   Curricular Recommendations

The Task Force's research efforts found that proven best practices at the overall program / institutional level involve a combination of two elements. The first is a solid grounding in the foundations of academic writing through either an introductory-level composition course or a writing-intensive first-year course such as the Valpo Freshman Core or Christ College Freshman Program. This is then

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followed by (occasionally it accompanies rather than follows) the second: an introduction and transition to writing in the various disciplines with significant practice therein.

Hence, based on Valpo's organization and existing curriculum, the Task Force recommends that all Valpo undergraduates complete a writing program with this basic curricular progression:

1. Completion of the Core or the Christ College Freshman Program.

2. Completion of at least one writing intensive general education course. The intent here is to help maintain a student's writing proficiency if there is a gap in time between the freshman-level intensive writing instruction and a specific WID transition course in the student's major. For some students, there will be little or no time gap; however, the Task Force recommends this be a requirement for all students in that it will give them additional writing practice in a rudimentary, discipline-specific context much more so than that encountered in their first-year experience.

3. Completion of a Writing in the Discipline transition course typically in the sophomore or junior year.

4. Completion of a capstone course or requirement in the major with a significant writing component.

None of the measures recommended in this progression necessarily require the addition of new courses to the existing curriculum. In most cases, existing courses will meet, or can be modified and sequenced to meet, these requirements. (See **Appendix 4** for a chart summarizing this program.) A detailed discussion of each major component of the program follows.

1. **Core or the Christ College Freshman Program (First Year Experience)**

The Task Force recommends that first-year writing instruction occur within the current bounds of the Core and Christ College Freshman Programs. Writing instruction and extensive writing assignments are already a deeply embedded part of the culture of both programs. The Task Force assumes that both these courses would meet the requirements for a writing intensive course every semester. The Task Force also assumes that hiring a Writing Program Director will have a positive impact on writing instruction in the Core and Christ College, particularly with regard to instructor training.

The Task Force did consider whether or not a freshman-level basic composition course should be added to Valpo's general education curriculum and decided against such a recommendation. It would be extremely difficult to add to the number of credits already required to graduate as well as the number of general education

courses required for the various degree programs. Adding a composition course would also raise serious questions about exactly what the Core program accomplishes and whether that warrants a total of ten credit hours of required course work.

2. Writing Intensive Courses

To be designated as a Writing Intensive course, whether for the first-year experience, general education, or a major field of study, a course must fulfill the following criteria:

- The maximum enrollment is 24 students.
- At least one formal graded writing assignment requires multiple drafts with instructor feedback on a preliminary draft.
- The instructor conducts at least one individual meeting during the course to discuss a student's writing (this may be in conjunction with the requirement above).
- There are at least three instances of formal, out-of-class writing assignments in the course requiring the equivalent of a cumulative total of at least 5,000 words (about 20 pages of 11 or 12 font type) of substantial prose text.
- At least 40 percent of the course grade must be based on formal writing assignments.
- There class time devoted to writing instruction and related activities in all the modes of writing that the course requires.

The Writing Intensive course requirement in the General Education program should be implemented without adding any credits to the students' overall load. We recommend, therefore, that this requirement be allowed to "double dip" with other requirements. For instance, we can envision numerous courses that meet the Humanities, Theology, or Social Sciences requirements receiving designation as Writing Intensive. While this approach does deviate from our current policy of not allowing any one course to simultaneously meet multiple General Education requirements, making this exception may further our writing-related goals because many students may take more than one Writing Intensive course. Again, this exception also avoids adding three more General Education credits to every student's curriculum. And again, the designation of writing intensive courses does not necessarily require the creation of new courses.

Review of courses for these criteria should fall to the General Education Committee. Only those courses reviewed and approved by the GEC should serve to meet this requirement.

3. Writing in the Discipline Transition Courses

The Writing in the Discipline transition course will be a required course in the student's major field of study, but the course need not necessarily be devoted exclusively to teaching writing, and it need not necessarily be housed in the

department or college offering the major. For example, the College of Business may decide that English 300, Introduction to Professional Writing, a course devoted exclusively to communications in business, industry, and the non-profit sectors, housed in the English Department, and taught almost exclusively by faculty from that department, is the appropriate WID transition course for business majors. As another example of the sort of course that might be appropriate for designation as a WID transition course, the Department of History may decide that one of its own courses, History 300, Historiography and Methods, while not devoted exclusively to the teaching of writing in the discipline, is the appropriate venue for a WID transition course for history majors and revise the course so that it meets the criteria outlined below.

A Writing in the Discipline course must achieve the following:

- Convey to the students the purpose of writing in the discipline.
- Introduce students to disciplinary databases and resources such as journals and other secondary sources.
- Outline the best practices of writing in the discipline.
- Address any unique elements (form, vocabulary, etc.) of writing in the discipline.
- Provide substantial practice for students at both writing and reviewing writing in the discipline.
- Require every student to complete at least one formal graded writing assignment that requires multiple drafts with instructor feedback on a preliminary draft.

Additionally, a WID course should convey to students the need for, and value of, being able to write to both a specialized audience within one's field and a general audience beyond one's field.   However, departments and programs are free to decide where best to provide this instruction within their curricula. This could be in the initial WID course, it could be in the capstone experience, or it could be somewhere in between.

4. **Courses with a Capstone Writing Event**

Capstone courses or experiences in all disciplines will, at a minimum, meet the following criteria:

- The course will require of every student a substantial, discipline-appropriate project that includes a research or design or performance (or combination thereof) element followed by a written, formal reflection on the process of developing and executing the project (this is often referred to as *metacognition* in recent literature).
- The project will be of such a nature that it could be presented to an audience although such a presentation is not required.

C. Additional Faculty Recommendations

In order to implement such a curriculum and assist the Writing Director, the Student Writing Task Force also strongly recommends that tenure-track faculty staffing includes individuals with credentials in specific writing specialties. These positions will help ensure that students receive effective instruction both at the foundational as well as disciplinary levels.   After considerable discussion, the Task Force decided the most appropriate place to assign these individuals, at least initially, was in the Department of English.   This is because these faculty members will be instrumental in delivering the Department's major and minor programs in professional writing and the growing academic minor in TESOL, also housed in the Department of English. Further, from the Department these faculty members will be in a position to deliver general support and assistance to other colleges across the University. Similar to the situation involving the lack of a rhetoric and composition specialist, Valpo currently delivers these programs, with the exception of the minor in TESOL, with faculty members who have experience in the field and are effective teachers, yet lack formal credentials or degrees in the field. This void currently makes it difficult to deliver seminar-level courses in professional or business writing or to lend highly specialized technical writing assistance to students in, for example, the College of Engineering. Tenure-track faculty with writing specialties needed are:

- One credentialed technical writing specialist, preferably with some engineering background or significant experience.

- One credentialed business writing specialist, preferably with experience in business, industry, non-profit, or government service.

- Two tenure-track faculty positions that include significant expertise and experience in TESOL. These positions are necessary due to anticipated increases in the number of international students, many of whom will be graduate students. These positions will be housed in the Department of English. It should be noted here that we already have one such individual in place and another who has the credentials but lacks a tenure-track appointment.

D. Additional Recommendations

A fundamental belief that the Task Force held is that some of the very best support that a student can receive so far as writing instruction and assistance are concerned is the personal attention of his or her professor(s) both within and outside the classroom itself. Consequently, there are several traditional, proven, basic measures that the Task Force recommends the University adopt to support effective writing instruction. These include:

- Limiting class size for Core, composition, and other instructional writing courses. Generally, classes should be capped somewhere between 16 and 24 students depending on the nature and level of the course.

- That overall course loads for instructors who teach writing be such that an instructor has time for generous office hours as well as the ability to meet with students outside of established office hours. This is particularly important as the number of international and non-traditional students increases in accordance with the Strategic Plan.

- Continue to support the Writing Center with the staff and financial resources it needs for student and faculty support. Two specific areas here would be with very robust support for students with English as a second language and for graduate student assistance.

- Continue to provide occasional faculty workshops as needed to help "teach the teachers" effective writing pedagogies and to give the Writing Director yet another venue for reaching faculty members.

IV. Assessment

This section of the report discusses guidelines developed by the Student Writing Task Force for how the University would assess the recommended writing program.

A. Curricular Assessment

As outlined in the introduction to this report, in April, 2010, the Faculty Senate adopted a series of General Education Student Learning Objectives. At the time this report was prepared, all programs and departments offering courses for general education credit had been directed to add general education assessment components to their existing assessment plans. In a similar manner, should the curricular recommendations in this report be adopted, all departments and programs will need to add specific writing assessment measures to their existing assessment plans. Assessment of writing related SLOs would then be folded in to existing assessment plans and to the existing structure for assessment from departmental to university level. To assist with this, the Writing Task Force developed basic assessment guidelines for each major level of the recommended writing program along with accompanying specific SLOs based on the existing writing-related University and General Education SLOs.

First, at the university-level, should the curricular recommendations of this be adopted, the Task Force recommends supplementing the existing writing-related SLOs with the following specific Student Learning Outcomes for Valparaiso's Writing Program.

Upon graduation, Valpo students can:

- Write for a variety of purposes, including imaginative, reflective, and analytical.
- Construct well-reasoned arguments.
- Write for a variety of audiences to include general and discipline specific.
- Write with appropriate mechanics, grammar, and vocabulary in accordance with the conventions of standard written English.
- Find, evaluate, and make use of relevant, high-quality sources.
- Demonstrate good rhetorical judgment in crafting a piece of writing.

1. **Assessment of the First Year Experience Writing Component**

The Core and Christ College Freshman Program's own assessment plans must include measures for assessing their courses' learning objectives and goals pertaining to writing. These writing goals must support and contribute to Valpo's University-wide SLOs and the accompanying General Education SLOs; however, programs and departments should refine and add specificity to these university-level, comprehensive learning objectives. With that in mind, the Task Force recommends the following Student Writing Learning Objectives for Valparaiso's First-Year Experience.

Upon completion of the Freshman Core or Christ College Freshman Program, students can:

- In their academic writing, frame a thesis-driven argument, gather appropriate evidence to support it, and use good rhetorical judgment along with satisfactory written language skills to present it.
- Demonstrate critical thinking skills in their reading, writing, and discussion, to include their reviews of peers' written work.

2. **Assessment of Writing Intensive General Education Courses**

All departments and programs that offer courses fulfilling a general education requirement are required to have a general education assessment component as part of their departmental or program assessment plans. Because WI courses are general education courses, units that offer them must ensure that their general education assessment plans include writing assessment measures. Again, the learning objectives of these courses must support the published University and general education SLOs. Hence, the Task Force recommends the following Student Writing Learning Objectives for Writing-Intensive General Education Courses.

Upon completion of a writing-intensive general education course, students can:

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- Construct reasoned arguments in a rudimentary, more discipline-specific context than encountered in their first-year experience.
- Find, evaluate, and make use of relevant, high-quality sources.
- Improve the quality of their writing through the revision of multiple drafts.

3. **Assessment of Writing in the Discipline Transition and Capstone Writing Experience Courses (i.e. Writing in the Academic Major)**

Similarly, existing assessment plans for majors offered by departments and programs must include specific measures for assessing the writing goals and objectives in WID and capstone courses. A critical point about these plans is that the two must be linked. That is to say, the writing objectives for a WID course and the writing objectives for the writing component of a subsequent capstone course must be coherent. The WID course's writing objectives start students toward achieving the capstone course's writing objectives, hence assessing the writing components of these two courses, and any in between, is all of a piece. Consequently, the Task Force recommends the following Student Writing Leaning Objectives for Academic Majors

Through writing experiences in their academic majors, students can:

- Use the language, media, resources, formats, styles, and techniques of their respective disciplines effectively and persuasively.
- Demonstrate fundamental best practices of writing in their disciplines.
- Successfully prepare a substantial project in their disciplines, including, at minimum, written reflection on the entire preparation process.

B. **Writing Placement Examinations for Non-native Speakers of English**

The Task Force strongly recommends administering an English language placement exam to all incoming undergraduate non-native speakers of English. This recommendation was developed in consultation with those on the faculty who have Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) credentials and who are actively engaged with English as a Second Language (ESL) work at Valpo. These faculty members have found that neither completion of the INTERLINK program, scores on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), nor admission application essays are consistently reliable indicators of incoming students' actual English language skills. Hence, the need for a locally-administered placement exam much like what the University does with math and foreign language placement exams for incoming freshmen.

The results of a placement exam will place the student in one of three levels. Those scoring low on the exam will be placed in English 101, English for International Students, a course in English grammar and basic composition skills. These students must successfully complete English 101 before advancing to the Freshman Core

program. Students scoring in an intermediate range will be assigned to an international section of the Freshman Core taught by an ESL-credentialed instructor. Placing students who lack strong English skills into international sections of Core has been a common practice at Valpo for several years. While the Task Force is generally opposed to segregating international students for classes, this practice has proven very effective in boosting these students' English skills. Finally, non-native English speakers who score high on the placement exam will be assigned to standard Core or Christ College Freshman Program sections as would any other student.

The Task Force considered administering a placement exam to all incoming freshmen but is not recommending such a measure now. In general, the Core and Christ College Freshman Programs quickly identify those students who are weak writers and instructors commence appropriate corrective actions.   With the growing variety of services becoming available from the Academic Support Center, options for teachers to help students struggling with writing are increasing. For the short term, it was not clear to the Task Force what advantages would be gained by implementing a placement test for all incoming freshmen. However, should the University hire a Writing Director, we do recommend that he or she reexamine this issue.

C.   Writing Proficiency Examinations for All Students

The Task Force considered the value of instituting a mandatory writing proficiency exam. Such an exam would be a required of every student and failure to complete it to standard would ultimately prevent the student from progressing until he or she demonstrated required proficiency. In some respects, such an event is analogous to passing a behind-the-wheel test before one is issued a driver's license. While opinions on this vary, one practice that the Task Force strongly recommends against adopting is a stand-alone writing proficiency exam. That is to say, do not adopt a proficiency exam administered outside of a mandatory course in the general education curriculum. The downfall of such exams, which have been tried at many institutions, is that they are an add-on to graduation requirements and are typically administered and evaluated by graduate students or contingent faculty receiving some sort of stipend for the work. Hence, there is no real sense of ownership or investment on the part of the regular faculty. Such exams normally become expensive administrative burdens that lose their effectiveness over time.

However, the Task Force was in general agreement that a common, blind-graded, writing proficiency exam using a standard rubric and multiple evaluators should be instituted at some point in the first-year writing curriculum for all students, most likely near the end of the first semester. Such an event allows for not only assessment of individual student proficiency but assessment of the program's success at achieving SLOs as well. This exam should be a course requirement that is part of the common syllabus within both the Freshman Core and Christ College Freshman Programs. Though not uniform, a consensus seemed to be growing within the Task Force that perhaps a Core unit exam could serve the purpose if a common writing prompt was given to all students. Evaluators should be the regular teaching faculty

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of the courses augmented as necessary with volunteers from the University's faculty and staff. The Task Force could not come to a consensus as to exactly when the exam should occur, the format of such an exam, whether some students should be excused from the requirement based on demonstrated performance, and exactly what appropriate follow-up action would be for students who failed to demonstrate the required proficiency level. These sorts of details would certainly be an area for the proposed Writing Director, the Core Program Director, the Christ College Freshman Program Director, and the General Education Office, or a similar ad-hoc group to take up as a priority.

D. Electronic Portfolios

Although not discussed in detail, the Task Force had some conversation concerning the use of electronic writing portfolios ("e-portfolios") for program-level as well as individual assessment. The Task Force did not develop a recommendation in this area. Some schools have adopted e-portfolios as part of their assessment structure, and a number of tech firms are very willing to peddle their software, some of it quite sophisticated and expensive, to assist them in creating and managing e-portfolios. Few schools have adopted e-portfolios at the university level; they typically are used at some combination of college and department levels.

For schools that use portfolio systems, e-portfolios certainly ease the administrative burden and facilitate the handling and mechanics of record keeping and circulation. Schools that have implemented e-portfolio systems all note the importance of careful, extensive planning ahead of time and the need for wide faculty buy-in to make such systems work (Education Advisory Board report, July, 2010). A significant consideration for e-portfolios is that, like writing proficiency exams that are separate from course requirements; they impose add-ons to graduation requirements that are outside prescribed course work. Hence, there must be clear responsibility for monitoring timely completion of portfolio requirements by students and for enforcing standards required of work appearing in students' portfolios. In other words, are we truly willing to hold a student back from graduating because an item in that student's portfolio is missing or inadequate? Addressing such issues in appropriate detail was beyond the scope of the Task Force's charter but is another item appropriate for a Writing Director to take up.

V.   Summary and Conclusion

In sum, the Student Writing Task Force recommends that the University adopt the following recommendations to ensure the quality of student writing:

1. Create and fill a position for a qualified Writing Director at the university level who reports to the General Education Officer.

2. Realign the Writing Center organizationally such that its director reports to the Writing Director; keep the Writing Center adequately resourced.

3. Implement a writing program for all undergraduate students that includes rigorous first year instruction, at least one writing-intensive general education course, a WID transition course, and a capstone experience that includes a significant written component.

4. Ensure that the tenure-track faculty includes one business/professional writing specialist, one technical writing specialist, and two TESOL specialists.

5. Cap enrollment in writing and writing intensive courses to sixteen to twenty-four students; appropriately limit the course load of instructors teaching writing intensive courses.

6. Adopt the basic assessment objectives and measures outlined in this report.

7. Institute a writing placement exam for incoming undergraduates who are not native English speakers.

8. Institute some form of writing proficiency exam for all undergraduates.

The Task Force advances the recommendations presented in this report as offering the most potentially effective means for moving the University towards its strategic goal of graduating students "who can investigate and interpret information and who can communicate effectively within and across cultures in relevant media, and through current technologies." Indeed, given the character of our institution, these are the measures that will "ensure the quality of its students' writing skills."

While many Valpo graduates, particularly those in major fields that require considerable writing, do improve their writing skills, there is a lack of a coherent writing progression across a student's four years of undergraduate study. However, we lack full-time faculty members with the rhetoric and composition credentials required to fully design and implement such a progression. This is the fundamental area needing correction. The Task Force is convinced that a program based substantially on the proven successes of the Writing in the Disciplines movement will be optimal. We could, with our current faculty, implement many of the curricular revisions recommended in this report. However, it would also be with the uneasy feeling that we were doing so without having exactly the right sort of expertise on hand and attempting sophisticated engine overhaul with shade-tree mechanic's knowledge.

Appendix 1: Memo Regarding Valpo General Education Assessment Plan

M E M O R A N D U M

Office of the Provost

Date: February 17, 2011

To: Renu Juneja, Associate Provost
           Nola Schmidt, Chair, Committee on Assessment
           Tom Boyt, Dean, College of Business Administration
           Janet Brown, Dean, College of Nursing
           Kraig Olejniczak, Dean, College of Engineering
           Jon Kilpinen, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
           Mel Piehl, Dean, Christ College
           John Ruff, Director, Freshman Core Program
           Greg Stinson, Director of Institutional Research and Assessment
           Paul Tougaw, Chair, Educational Policy Committee (EPC)
           Robert Sirko, Chair, Art Department
           David Scupham, Chair, Biology Department
           Warren Kosman, Chair, Chemistry Department
           Douglas Kocher, Chair, Communication Department
           Virginia Shingleton, Chair, Economics Department
           Jan Westrick, Chair, Education Department
           Ed Uehling, Chair, English Department
           Randa Duvick, Chair, Foreign Languages and Literatures Department
           Bart Wolf, Chair, Geography and Meteorology Department
           Colleen Seguin, Chair, History Department
           Rick Gillman, Chair, Mathematics and Computer Science Department
           Joseph Bognar, Chair, Music Department
           Aaron Preston, Chair, Philosophy Department
           Barbara Tyree, Chair, Physical Education Department
           Stan Zygmunt, Chair, Physics and Astronomy Department
           Larry Baas, Chair, Political Science Department
           Dan Arkkelin, Chair, Psychology Department
           Matthew Ringenberg, Chair, Social Work Department
           Lissa Yogan, Chair, Sociology and Criminology Department
           Lee Orchard, Chair, Theatre Department
           George Heider, Chair, Theology Department

From: Mike Owens, General Education Officer
           Jeff Doebler, Chair, General Education Committee

Re: Valparaiso University General Education Assessment Plan

Valparaiso University General Education Assessment Plan

Purpose:

This document outlines a plan for the regular assessment of Valparaiso University's General Education Program. The purpose of the plan is to establish a system for regularly assessing the effectiveness of the Program in achieving desired student learning outcomes. The plan provides for the collection and analysis of assessment data as well as for the generation of an annual report that will be one of the principal means for revising and improving the General Education Program.

Introduction:

In April 2010, Valparaiso University's Faculty Senate adopted a series of General Education Learning Objectives based on its ten University-Wide Student Learning Objectives and the requirements of the University's General Education Program. These include a series of overall objectives for the Program along with sets of specific objectives for each of the academic areas represented in the general education curriculum. Thus, in keeping with the principle of faculty oversight and responsibility for curriculum, by the Senate's adoption of the General Education Learning Objectives, the faculty is assigning responsibility for achievement of the appropriate set of objectives to all course offerings that fulfill general education requirements. This includes courses that are occasionally offered by Christ College, the College of Business, and the College of Nursing that will partially fulfill a general education requirement.

The assessment plan outlined here was designed by the General Education Committee and approved by the University Committee on Assessment in February, 2011.

General Education Assessment Plan:

All departments and programs that offer any courses fulfilling a Valparaiso University General Education requirement are to add a general education assessment component to their existing program or departmental assessment plans no later than May 16, 2011. Departmental plans are to include assessment of applicable General Education Learning Objectives as adopted by the Faculty Senate.

While a course offered in partial or total fulfillment of a general education requirement should incorporate all the applicable General Education Learning Objectives, it is not necessary to assess every objective every year. As is sometimes done with assessment in a department's major fields of study, a department may choose to assess selected General Education Leaning Objectives on a cyclical basis.

During the Fall 2011 semester, the General Education Committee (GEC) will review the general education component of all departmental and program assessment plans. The GEC will then make recommendations for approval or modification of departmental and program plans to the University Committee on Assessment.

Commencing in January, 2012, all departments and programs that are not already reporting general education assessment information are asked to begin doing so as part of their annual assessment reports to the University Committee on Assessment.

The GEC, as a subcommittee of the Educational Policy Committee of the Faculty Senate, will review and analyze the general education section of all reports submitted to the Committee on Assessment.   Based on its review, the GEC will then report back to the Committee on Assessment with its analysis of and recommendations for the general education program.

The University Committee on Assessment will, in turn, include general education assessment in its annual, comprehensive report on assessment.

Encl: General Education Student Learning Objectives

Valparaiso University Undergraduate General Education Learning Objectives
Adopted by the Faculty Senate, April 14, 2010

Philosophy of General Education

The educational philosophy of Valparaiso University grows from its strong commitment to both faith and learning. This commitment calls upon faculty and students to pursue knowledge freely, with intellectual honesty and responsibility. Also rooted in this commitment is the University's mission to equip its students to deal creatively and humanely with intellectual and ethical challenges that will face them not just in their careers but in all of life. It is with an understanding of the importance of helping its students to become reflective citizens ready to serve both society and church that Valparaiso University has developed its program of general education.

Further, in 2009 the Faculty Senate adopted a set of ten University-Wide Student Learning Objectives (USLO). Because the General Education Program is largely common to all undergraduates, it is the principal means by which VU achieves its USLOs.
Commensurate with the General Education mission and the USLOs, the University has developed the following Student Leaning Objectives for the General Education Program. Nine of the overall general education learning objectives have been adopted directly from VU's ten USLOs. Specific responsibilities for these have been assigned to appropriate departments or programs that support the general education curriculum along with additional learning objectives specified by the departments or programs themselves. Two additional learning objectives unique to the General Education program have been added to these nine and labeled GSLOs 1 and 2.

Overall Objectives of the General Education Program:

USLO 1   Students will demonstrate skill in various methods of acquiring knowledge in the humanities, social and natural sciences, quantitative reasoning, and the creative arts.

USLO 2   Students will master and demonstrate content knowledge by using methods such as inference, generalization, and application.

USLO 3   Students will become active learners by finding, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information.

USLO 4   Students will demonstrate the ability to build logical and persuasive arguments, cases reports, and / or responses.

USLO 5   Students will communicate clearly and effectively in both oral and written forms.

USLO 7   Students will interact and collaborate effectively in groups and teams.

USLO 8   Students will explore the relationship between faith and learning.

USLO 9   Students will practice the virtues of empathy, honesty, and justice in their academic endeavors.

USLO 10   Students will appreciate that diversity in areas such as culture, gender, race, sexual orientation, and religion is pertinent to functioning successfully in a global community.

GSLO 1   Students will appreciate the importance of mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

GSLO 2   Students will recognize that the acquisition of knowledge is a life-long process, and that the truly educated person is not simply a narrow specialist but able to integrate learning from different fields of inquiry.

Freshman Core Program:

USLOs 2-5 and 7-10. GSLO 2.
1. Students will demonstrate recognition and understanding of cultural differences encountered in texts and articulate connections that may transcend them.
2. Students will show an understanding and basic appreciation of the affective dimension of a text.

Theology:

USLOs 2-5, 8, 10.
1. Students will demonstrate a familiarity with significant aspects of Christianity, with special attention to the religiously pluralistic nature of the world. Such familiarity includes understanding Christianity's technical vocabulary, classic texts, history and practices, and chief problems.

Cultural Diversity: Foreign Languages and Diversity Course

USLOs 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 10.
1. Students will demonstrate an acquisition of the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking appropriate to a specific level of the target language.
2. Students will demonstrate an awareness of language and its structure.
3. Students will demonstrate an understanding that one communicates in a foreign language through language skills along with a critical consideration of the culture, beliefs, traditions, values, and ways of life of those who speak the target language.
4. Students will demonstrate an understanding of diversity within the historical development of a cultural tradition, or knowledge acquired by a comparative study of contrasting cultures, or knowledge acquired by an examination of minority traditions within a dominant culture.

Humanities:

USLOs 1-5. GSLO 2.
1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of fundamental intellectual, aesthetic, metaphysical, and/or ethical dimensions of human existence.
2. Students will demonstrate knowledge of how the past connects with the present through history, literature, and the creative arts in the Western and/or non-Western intellectual traditions.

Social Sciences:

USLOs 1-5, 10.
1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the many and varied systems that comprise society, how these change over time, and what the students' places and roles are within those systems.
2. Students will explore the interactive relationship between society and the environment as it involves topics like resource use, conservation, health, and food production.

Quantitative Analysis:

USLOs 1-4.
1. Students will express contextual problems in both abstract and symbolic forms as well as analyze relationships through symbolic, graphical, and statistical means.

Natural Sciences:

USLOs 1-3. GSLO 2.
1. Students will understand the methodology of science as a way of knowing about the world.
2. Students will achieve a level of scientific literacy that enables them to both use the language of science appropriately and critically evaluate science as portrayed in media and popular culture.

Health and Wellness:

GSLO 1.
1. Students will identify a holistic approach to health and fitness that incorporates affective, cognitive, and motor domains.

Appendix 2: Valpo OIRA Summary of Student Writing Assessment Project

Quality of Student Writing

At the end of the Spring 2010 semester a group of Valpo faculty met to read a sample of senior and first year papers. The papers were read by multiple readers who scored the writing using a standard holistic rubric. Below is a brief summary of the findings.

Table 1: Ratings of First Year and Senior Papers

	FY	SR
N	27	44
Mean	4.2	4.2
Median	4	4
Mode	3.5	3.5
S.D.	1.04	0.91

These data indicate that there is no evidence of improvement in the quality of student writing between their first year at Valpo and their senior year. In both instances, the average rating is slightly above adequate.

Table 2: Frequency Distributions of Ratings of Senior and First Year Papers

	SR		FY	
Score	N	%	N	%
6	2	5%	3	11%
5.5	4	9%	4	15%
5	6	14%	0	0%
4.5	8	18%	4	15%
4	7	16%	4	15%
3.5	10	23%	8	30%
3	6	14%	3	11%
2.5	1	2%	1	4%
Total	44	100%	27	100%

The frequency distributions provide further evidence that student writing skills do not improve over time. The overall distribution for each group is similar with the notable exception that a higher percentage of first year students score in the highest two categories (26% of FY compared to 14% of seniors).

Overall, these data indicate that there does not appear to be value-added learning occurring in relation to writing for students during their last three years at Valpo. (The project did not assess improvement during the first year.)

Quantity of Student Writing
Table 3: Senior Responses to NSSE Items Specifically on Writing

	2010		2007	
Percent of Seniors Reporting:	VU	Peers	VU	Peers
5 or more 20+ page papers	4%	10%	5%	7%
11 or more 5-19 page papers	18%	23%	18%	20%
11 or more papers <5 pages	50%	41%	39%	41%
2 or more drafts of paper often	36%	40%	33%	50%

Table 4: Statistical Analysis of Means

	2010			2007		
Seniors Reporting:	VU	Peers	Sig.	VU	Peers	Sig.
20+ page papers	1.62	1.73	p<.05	1.57	1.69	p<.001
5-19 page papers	2.72	2.80	n.s.	2.69	2.78	n.s.
papers <5 pages	3.45	3.26	p<.01	3.2	3.25	n.s.
2 or more drafts of paper	2.32	2.37	n.s.	2.19	2.39	p<.001

The data above provide information about the emphasis placed on writing in the curriculum for our seniors. Valpo data is compared with data for eleven peer institutions who also participated in the NSSE project in 2010. These data indicate that our writing assignments seem to emphasize shorter papers and that we are less likely to require multiple drafts. This finding is consistent with previous results in 2007 and 2004. We appear to have added more short papers (less than 5 pages) to our requirements, but there does not appear to be any change in papers between 5 and 19 pages or in papers of 20 pages or more. In both instances we are below our peers.

One common explanation for why our numbers are lower is that it has to do with the distribution of students across majors. Critics have explained away our low numbers by pointing to our high number of professional degree students as the reason for the low numbers for writing. The argument is that arts, humanities, and social science students will naturally write more so we would expect lower aggregate numbers for Valpo.

NSSE has addressed this with a new report that breaks the results down by field of study.

The major field study compares students in various fields (Engineering, Business, Education, Biological Sciences, Physical Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Social Science, and Other Professional Programs). The Major Field Report (not presented here) indicates that we require less writing of our seniors in most programs. We are either below or roughly equal to our peers in each of these categories. The data indicate that we do not require more writing than our peers in any of these fields.

Assignments and Faculty Feedback
The outlines for writing assignments and faculty comments and feedback on student papers were analyzed using guidelines established by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). All the writing assignment outlines submitted by seniors were

examined to determine how effective faculty were at addressing the items identified by CCCC as important for an assignment to be effective.

The analysis showed that the overwhelming majority of assignments failed to meet the CCCC standards. Very few outlines provided clear instructions to guide students or information linking the assignment to broader class goals. Few assignments provided examples, detailed explanations, or specific expectations on writing quality.

The evaluation of faculty comments showed similar results. Faculty comments on the overwhelming majority of the papers lacked the specificity identified by CCCC.

Appendix 3: Memo Regarding Follow-Up Actions to the Core Program Review

M E M O R A N D U M

Office of the Provost

Date: April 26, 2011

To: John Ruff, Director, Freshman Core Program

Cc: Mark Schwehn, Provost and Executive Vice President. for Academic Affairs

               Jeff Doebler, Chair, General Education Committee

From: Mike Owens, Asst. Provost for Faculty Affairs and General Education Officer

Re: Follow-Up Actions to the Core Program Review

After reviewing the results of the Freshman Core Course self-study completed in December, 2010, along with the report of the external evaluation team received earlier this month, I want to compliment you and the entire Core faculty for their excellent teaching and obvious dedication to the program. The evaluators were particularly impressed by the level of cooperation they saw among the faculty of the Core program and claim, "Very few programs have anywhere come close to this degree of coordination among the faculty." The evaluators were also quite effusive in their praise of the Core as a first-year experience for students. These are results which you and your team should be justifiably proud of.

Having now had a chance to review and digest the entire program review and discuss results with the Provost, we've concluded that there are aspects of the course that need improvement and appropriate follow-up. This is not surprising and is, of course, one of the significant purposes of a program review in the first place. Some of these will be long-term changes based on the entire program review, the Strategic Plan, and the on-going work of the Student Writing Task Force. These will be developed over the next several months in consultation and collaboration with the appropriate governance structures. Others are more near-term areas in which you, working in conjunction with the Syllabus Committee, need to take action relatively quickly. In particular, the areas for immediate attention include:

- Review the Core course goals and objectives and propose revised statements that are more sharply focused and less ambitious and all-encompassing. These proposed revisions should be aligned with the University's mission statement, Strategic Plan, and General Education Student Learning Objectives adopted in April, 2011. If adopted, these goals and objectives should be used consistently to describe the course from the university, or General Catalog, level down to the syllabus itself.

- In conjunction with the Core Syllabus Committee, significantly reduce the amount of assigned reading to a level that both allows for more depth during class discussion as well

as for devoting more time to writing instruction and activities.

- Increase process-based writing instruction and emphasis on academic argumentation.

- Ensure that the assessment plan for Core is fully implemented and appropriate follow-up is conducted. Submit the plan for review by the University's General Education and Assessment committees as called for in the memo dated February 17, 2011, from the Chair of the General Education Committee and the General Education Officer.

- Based on the recommendation of the external evaluators and a similar but entirely independent recommendation from the Committee itself, the Core Program Director will be appointed to the University's General Education Committee. Please begin attending committee meetings.

I ask that you complete planning for these short-term items by Friday, December 2, 2011, and review your plans for implementing them with me by that date.

Congratulations again on completing an excellent program review and thank you for your dedication to the success of the Core program.

Appendix 4: Valpo Writing Program Summary

Program Element	Desired Outcome / Objective	Steps to Implement
First-Year Experience -Valpo CORE -Christ College Freshman Program	• Students understand our basic philosophy: -learn to write; write to learn • Provide foundational instruction in: -reasoned argument -thesis construction and support -different writing styles -paragraph development -finding, using, and citing sources • Achieve through practice	• Hire Writing Director • Consider possible suggestions from CORE review report • Rebalance reading and writing • Train instructors in writing • Develop an assessment program for this component per Writing TF report
Writing-Intensive Courses -"layered" requirement in Gen. Ed. -courses with significant writing component, including both assignments and instruction -enrollment limited to ≤24 students	• Students will maintain and build on the skills and proficiency of the First-Year Experience • Continued emphasis on *reasoned argument* and *evaluating sources* • Steady student improvement in mechanics, grammar, etc. • See details in Writing TF report	• Develop a clear outline of writing-related goals for courses to be so designated • General Education Committee to vet and approve courses for this requirement • Submit proposal for new requirement to General Education Committee, EPC, and Faculty Senate • Develop an assessment program for these courses per Writing TF report
Writing in the Disciplines -junior/senior-level writing experience in each major program -students enter through a "transition" course for all majors/minors -writing elements will be infused through other courses in the major -culminate in a capstone project w/ a significant writing component	• Students will build further on their writing skills, adding depth of understanding in their major academic fields so as to "think" like someone in that field • Students will understand how to use the language, media, resources, formats, styles, and techniques of their disciplines • Further improvement in mechanics, grammar, etc. • See Writing TF Report for details	• Each program will identify (or develop) a "transition" course for majors and minors • Each program will add writing to additional courses, including a capstone experience • Develop a clear outline of writing-related goals for programs to meet • Develop assessment guidelines for programs to follow • See Writing TF report for details

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McLeod, Susan and Margo Soven. *Writing Across the Curriculum: A Guide to Developing Programs*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992. Republished as *Academic Writing: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on communication Across the Curriculum* at http://aw.colostate.edu/books. 2000.

Monroe, Jonathan. "Writing and the Disciplines." *Peer Review: A Publication of the Association of American Colleges and Universities* 6:1 (2003): 4-7.

Thaiss, Chris and Terry Myers Zawacki, *Engaged Writers & Dynamic Disciplines: Research on the Academic Writing Life*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 2006.

Student Writing Task Force notes on sources for best practices in teaching writing.

Business writing:

William J. Wardrope. (2002) "Department Chairs' Perceptions of the Importance of Business Communication Skills," Business Communication Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 4 (December): pp. 60-72.

Claudia MonPere Mclsaac and James F. Sepe. (1996) "Improving the Writing of Accounting Students: A Cooperative Venture," Journal of Accounting Education, Vol. 14, No. 4: pp. 515--533, 1996.

Dale Krueger. (2001) "Writing and Levels of Critical Thinking," Proceedings of the Academy of Educational Leadership, Vol. 6, No. 2: pp.75-80.

Tim Firch, Annhenrie Campbell, David H. Lindsay, and Don E. Garner. (2010) "On Developing the Writing Skills Course for Accounting Students," American Journal of Business Education, Vol. 3, No. 4 (April): pp. 61-65.

Composition:

Engaged Writers & Dynamic Disciplines, by Chris Thaiss and Terry Myers Zawacki (Boynton/Cook/Heinemann, 2006. Chris Thaiss developed the premier WAC program at George Mason and is one of the most respected people in the field (I believe he is now at UC Irvine). This brief book is research based but written in a language suitable for working with faculty in all disciplines. Also includes a link to rubrics.

Assessing Writing: A Critical Sourcebook by Brian Huot and Peggy O'Neil (Bedford/St. Martin, 2009). Two essays should be especially helpful: Ch. 15: " WAC Assessment and Internal Audiences: A Dialogue" by Richard Haswell and Susan McLeod, and Ch. 16: "A Process for Establishing Outcomes-Based Assessment Plans for Writing and Speaking in the Disciplines" by Michael Carter. This text might be available as an e-text.

Reference Guide to Writing Across the Curriculum, Charles Bazerman, et al (Parlor Press, 2005). The last chapter includes sources and links for writing in several disciplines, including math, English/ Lit/ Language Arts, Economics, and History.

From the National Council of the Teachers of English:

Position statements: http://www.ncte.org/positions

Catalog: The college category of the NCTE turns up many interesting looking books; I did not see any new books that looked like current definitive essays.

College Composition and Communication, a journal

Annotated Bibliography of Research in the Teaching of English: An Introduction --available online at http://www.ncte.org/positions. See the entry titled Research in the Teaching of English, Vol. 45, No. 2 November 2010.

Legal writing:

A recent informal survey was conducted on our listserv, asking participants to list the 3 resources they believed were indispensable to teaching legal writing.

William Strunk & E.B. White, The Elements of Style

Anne Lamott, Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life

Bryan A. Garner, The Redbook: A Manual on Legal Writing Style

Richard C. Wydick, Plain English for Lawyers

Joseph M. Williams, Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace

Mary Barnard Ray & Jill J. Ramsfield, Legal Writing: Getting It Right and Getting It Written

Anne Enquist & Laurel Currie Oates, Just Writing: Grammar, Punctuation, and Style for the Legal Writer

Stephen V. Armstrong & Timothy P. Terrell, Thinking Like a Writer: A Lawyer's Guide to Effective Writing and Editing

Mary Beth Beazley, A Practical Guide to Appellate Advocacy

The Chicago Manual of Style

Marjorie E. Skillin & Robert Malcolm Gay, Words into Type

Alan L. Dworsky, The Little Book on Legal Writing

Linda H. Edwards, Legal Writing and Analysis

Miscellaneous:

Writing Papers in the Biological Sciences by Victoria E. McMillan, 4th ed., 2006, Bedford Books. ISBN 0-312-44083-9

The Craft of Research (Booth, Colomb, and Williams)

Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace (Williams and Colomb)

L. Dee Fink's excellent book, *Creating Significant Learning Experiences*, pp. 116-119

Various articles from the *Journal of Teaching Writing* at IUPUI (index at
http://www.iupui.edu/~jtw/issue-index.html)

Improving Student Writing: A Case History, Elissa S. Guralnick and Paul M. Levitt

College English Vol. 38, No. 5 (Jan., 1977), pp. 506-511