Because clear writing is a hallmark of an educated person and clear writing and critical thinking are integrally related, the General Studies Writing Program (GSW) is central to undergraduate education at Bowling Green State University. Each year, the program’s three courses enroll almost 7,000 students. One of these courses, ENG 112, is the only course that all BGSU students must satisfy—an indication of the importance that the faculty places on writing.

The Program Review Committee’s final report indicates that GSW meets its significant responsibilities well, helping BGSU students develop their writing skills. PRC praises the Program’s administration and teaching staff for its professionalism and dedication. Course design is thoughtful, with courses sharing a common rubric and sequential courses building on what students have learned in their previous courses. Course syllabi are detailed, provide guidance to instructors and students alike, and help ensure consistency across hundreds of sections—as do the common rubric, effective training for new instructors, careful monitoring of instructors, and an elaborate portfolio review process. Clearly, the program is well designed and administered and effectively delivered.

Although GSW is fundamentally sound, the PRC’s final report indicates areas that need attention—several of which are beyond the immediate control of GSW’s leadership. These include the relationship between GSW and the University’s General Education Program, the relationship between GSW and the English Department (and especially its rhetoric and composition faculty), the relationship between GSW and the Writer’s lab, program staffing, inadequate attention to technology, and the absence of a writing-across-the-curriculum program. Other matters raised by PRC—such as clearly stated learning outcomes and relatively high pass rates—can be addressed by GSW administrators themselves.

While generally accepting PRC’s recommendations, Dr. Donna Nelson-Beene’s thoughtful response offers insights and caveats that will be useful in ensuring effective implementation.

I accept the recommendations contained in the PRC’s final report subject to following stipulations:

- The College should play a leading role in ensuring a clearer, more suitable relationship between the English Department and GSW. Therefore, I shall convene a series of meetings between the GSW Director and the Chair of the English Department to reorganize the GSW Committee, create a closer, clearer relationship between rhetoric/composition faculty and GSW, and create a separate budget for GSW.
I agree with Dr. Nelson-Beene that the relationship between the GSW Committee and the Director must be clarified. While the committee can be helpful in serving as a sounding board and offering advice, it will inevitably include individuals who do not teach in the program and are not directly involved in program administration. Decision-making must lie in the hands of the Director, who has responsibility for administering and providing leadership for the program. Therefore, the GSW Committee’s role must be advisory to the Director, not directive.

During the past year the College has both increased the number of full-time GSW faculty and the number of GSW faculty on renewable contracts. The College is mindful that the GSW Program serves every student in the University and will continue to work with the GSW Director and Chair of the English Department to ensure appropriate staffing. The College will consider requests from the English Department for tenure track faculty in rhetoric and composition who contribute to the GSW Program. However, I must dissent from PRC’s suggestion that the rhetoric and composition faculty will “decide whether these [additional] positions will be tenure track or lecturer lines.” This issue has important ramifications for the College as a whole and the GSW Program and therefore cannot be determined by the English Department or a portion thereof. During the past year the College has attempted to give the Director of GSW greater authority over staffing in an effort to streamline program administration and ensure that the program’s needs were met. In the future, recommendations for staffing should come from the Director with the advice of the GSW Committee. Because this body will include rhetoric/composition faculty, that group will be assured input.

I am not persuaded that a passage rate of 80% in GSW courses—by itself—raises a concern. PRC offers no information suggesting that passage rates at peer institutions are substantially lower or—even more probative—that evaluation of student performance is not sufficiently rigorous. The Director and the GSW Committee should constantly assess program standards to ensure that they are setting the bar sufficiently high and that students who successfully complete ENG 112 are effective writers. However, they should not equate rigor with high failure rates or feel compelled to lower success rates unless the assessment process reveals that students are satisfying the GSW requirement without achieving the learning outcomes.

PRC recommends that during the 2004-05 academic year, the GSW Committee should devise a method for periodic evaluation of the Director. I agree that a thorough periodic review is essential, but believe that the review process should be developed much sooner. I also believe that the Director should have a four-year term (with eligibility for reappointment) and be appointed by the Dean, in consultation with the GSW Faculty and the Chair of the English Department. This will ensure accountability, encourage continuity of program leadership, and facilitate smooth transition in the event of a change of leadership. During the 2001-02 academic year, I will appoint a committee (consisting of the Chair of the English and members of the GSW Committee) to develop a process for appointment, reappointment, and periodic review of the Director.
While the PRC’s report addresses periodic evaluation of the Director, it says nothing about annual evaluations. Because the Director serves a broader constituency than the English Department, his/her annual merit evaluation should be done outside the department—albeit with input from the department. Therefore, beginning with the evaluation for 2002 (or for 2001 if the Director chooses), the salary increment generated by the Director’s salary will be moved to the Chair/Director pool in the Dean’s Office, and I will determine her merit increment. In doing so, I will be guided by input from GSW faculty concerning program administration, from the Chair of the English Department and English Department SPT Committee concerning performance as a member of the English Department, and my own assessment of effectiveness in leading the GSW Program. This is designed to ensure that rewards are aligned with performance in the Director’s principal area of responsibility—administering and leading the GSW Program.

I endorse PRC’s ideas concerning writing-across-the-curriculum and developmental writing. To ensure an integrated approach to teaching writing, directors of these programs should report to the Director of General Studies Writing. During the coming year, I will work closely with the Provost to identify resources to recruit individuals to provide the necessary leadership in both areas.

I believe the GSW Program performs a difficult task and performs it well. I am confident that careful attention to issues raised by PRC—notably careful delineation of the program’s relationship to the English Department and General Education, attention to its staffing needs, and creating a writing-across-the-curriculum program—will help us prepare students who write and think clearly. I look forward to working with the English Department, staff in the GSW Program, and the Provost to achieve the PRC’s noble goal—that BGSU graduates “should be known for their literacy.”

Donald G. Nieman, Dean

Concurred:

John W. Folkins, Provost