Program Review Committee Report
General Studies Writing Program

Review Process

The General Studies Writing Program (GSW) prepared a self-study following program review guidelines. An external review committee reviewed the self-study, visited the campus and interviewed unit personnel, interested faculty and university administrators. The committee, representing the Council of Writing Program Administrators, comprised Dr. Anne Gere, University of Michigan, and Dr. Douglas Hesse, Illinois State University. Their report and the GSW self-study were then reviewed by the Program Review Committee (PRC). A member of the PRC met with the Director of GSW after the external team’s report was received. This document reflects the PRC’s findings and recommendations.

Summary of the Self-Study

Overview and Mission

The faculty of Bowling Green State University feel that “the ability to communicate in writing is a valuable skill and a hallmark of an educated person” (1999-2001 Undergraduate Catalog, p. 7). To achieve this goal, the University requires all students to pass ENG 112, Varieties of Writing. This three-credit course is the only academic course required of every undergraduate in the University. ENG 112 is part of the General Studies Writing Program. The mission of the Program is to “support the writing skills [that BGSU] students will need in their personal and professional lives.” In addition to administering ENG 112, GSW administers the developmental and introductory courses that precede it. The latter consist of ENG 110S, Developmental Writing (3 credits, summer only); ENG 110, Developmental Writing (5 credits); and ENG 111, Introductory Writing (3 credits). In addition to the many sections of these courses offered each semester, additional sections are designed to accommodate non-native speakers of English, Honors and advanced placement students, and computer-aided writing. Over the last two years, all sections have together served almost 6900 enrollments per year.

The GSW self-study highlighted the values to which the GSW program administrators subscribe: quality instruction, attention to individual students, outreach to (and beyond) the university community, and acculturating students to the University. These values drive the directions taken by the GSW program at Bowling Green State University.

Staff/Facilities/Budget
The General Studies Writing Program is housed within the Department of English. It is headed by a director who reports to the Chair of English. The remainder of the administrative staff are an assistant director; a secretary, a 0.75 time instructional assistant, and four experienced GAs who give part time administrative assistance. At the time of the self-study, the instructional staff included one tenured faculty member; three lecturers, and one five-year instructor – none of whom teach full-time in the Program – 22 full-time instructors in one-year, terminal positions, 11 part-time instructors, and 52 graduate assistants. (The number of full-time instructor positions has since been increased to 25 of which 17 are now renewable.)

Administrative and teaching offices are housed in East Hall, where one computer classroom dedicated to General Studies Writing is also located.

The Program has no budget of its own. The Director requests from the Chair of English all personnel lines and supplies.

**Student Outcomes Assessment**

Student learning outcomes can be inferred from the grade criteria for each course in the GSW Program. ENG 110 and ENG 111 both focus on helping students demonstrate the elements of a writing rubric, which is used in all three courses in the program. ENG 112 tries to help students maintain the elements of the rubric but also demonstrate the characteristics of a compelling, expository essay.

The GSW rubric is keyed to the text, *The Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers*. This handbook is required in all GSW courses. Problem areas noted by the rubric direct students to the precise pages where they can find help. The rubric is used by all instructors in all classes and is also used in the Writers Lab.

Through the semester students collect their essays in a portfolio, which is graded by the instructor as well as by one or more additional independent readers at the end of the semester. When the independent reader passes the student, he/she is allowed to enroll in the next GSW class or to exit the sequence.

**Programmatic Assessment**

Students evaluate the instruction they receive in classes twice a semester. Administrators also visit classes as needed. The Program itself is evaluated formally by its instructors every two years and informally at all meetings of the instructional staff. A GSW committee composed of members elected by various constituencies also provides input to the administrators of the program.

The assistant director and program secretary are evaluated by the Director. The Director is evaluated in the same way the Department of English evaluates all probationary faculty.

**Program Strengths/Improvements**
The self-study mentioned the following program strengths:
1) the high level of training and support for teachers;
2) the consistency and coherence across all courses and sections within the Program; and
3) the “high degree of student success” and overall student satisfaction, as defined by:
   a) a greater than 80% pass rate in GSW classes;
   b) high student course evaluations; and
   c) the teachers are satisfied with the Program.

The self-study also cited the following recent improvements in the Program:
1) addition of an instructional assistant;
2) addition of a computer classroom instructional coordinator;
3) new computer classroom;
4) GSW Website;
5) improvement of reading materials in ENG 112;
6) procedures for exemption from ENG 112;
7) more equal enrollment across sections leading to more manageable class sizes;
8) full-time instructors now teaching 47.5% of the sections; and
9) increased autonomy from the English department, as evidenced by:
   a) the Director of GSW now handles the summer budget and submits class schedules directly to the Dean of Arts and Sciences; and
   b) the Director now attends the College of Arts and Sciences chairs and directors meetings.

Problems within the General Studies Writing Program

The self-study noted the following problems within the Program:

Lack of stability. At the time the self-study was written, 40% of the sections in the Program were taught by GAs and 12% by part-time instructors. The rest of the Program was taught primarily by full-time instructors on one-year, terminal contracts. It is hard to attract good people to these one-year positions. Furthermore, the constantly changing staff causes overwhelming administrative needs for providing inservice training, hiring, and monitoring new instructors.

Position within the Department of English. As one of several program areas within the English department, the General Studies Writing Program has to compete with those other programs for personnel lines and general resources. The Program has no operating budget of its own nor personnel lines of its own. All faculty/staff are hired through the English department, a process that slows even more the lengthy GSW hiring of its many, one-year appointees. Moreover, English will frequently reassign faculty, who have been hired for the GSW Program, to other areas of instruction within the Department. This practice increases program instability.
Lack of a Writing Across the Curriculum Program. While the GSW Program is charged with supporting the writing skills of BGSU students, its administrators do not feel they alone can be responsible for the writing of all students during their total academic careers. They propose a program that would enhance and evaluate writing skills in all aspects of the university curriculum over the four years of undergraduate education.

Increase in Under-Prepared Students. Many students in ENG 110 were admitted through the University’s UPAS program. This program allows students whose academic skills do not meet minimum university standards to enter the University. These students have inflated the class sizes in developmental writing, leading to poor morale among the instructors. Moreover, a qualified pool of teachers of developmental writing is lacking.

Administrative issues. The current instructional assistant is at the end of her third one-year, terminal instructorship contract. Loss of this person may cause additional programmatic instability. In addition, the current GSW administrators are inadequately compensated in comparison to national peers.

Recommendations by the General Studies Writing Program

The self-study made several recommendations to counter the problems enumerated:

Lack of stability. The Program asks for renewable instructorships instead of or in replacement of some of the one-year, terminal positions they now have. They also ask for removal of the five-year cap on current five-year instructorships. These changes would allow them to keep excellent instructors for longer periods, making the positions more interesting to prospective candidates and providing needed stability in the Program.

Positioning within the Department of English. Both the GSW program and the Department of English wish to explore greater separation between the units. The Program argues that the increased autonomy would lessen the bureaucracy within which they have to function and, thus, increase efficiency.

Lack of a Writing Across the Curriculum Program. The GSW Program recommends a “Writing Across the Curriculum” program headed by its own director. The goal of this program would be to maintain and improve student writing skills by working with departments across the University that offer undergraduate majors. If implementation of this suggestion is not possible, the GSW Program suggests moving ENG 112 to the junior year to coincide with more major coursework that requires writing, or having departments create their own courses in lieu of ENG 112. In this way the GSW program could focus on the teaching of ENG 110 and 111.

Increase in Under-Prepared Students. The General Studies Writing Program suggests that a developmental writing coordinator could ease the current administrative burdens posed by the influx of students into ENG 110.
Other Administrative Issues. The Program asks that the five-year cap on instructorships be removed to allow the current instructional assistant to remain in the position. The self-study also recommended that the inadequate compensation for GSW administrators be addressed in some way.

Results of Previous Reviews

This is the first cycle of program review for the General Studies Writing Program.

Summary of the External Report

Strengths Noted in the External Report

The external review team noted a number of strengths within the BGSU General Studies Writing Program. According to the reviewers, the Program “compares favorably with successful programs at other universities.” Among the many strengths of the Program are:

1) carefully delineated distinctions between ENG 110, 111, and 112;
2) clear, sophisticated syllabi for each of those courses;
3) strong connections of GSW with the Writers Lab;
4) use of portfolios to represent an entire semester of the students’ writing and the procedures used to evaluate those portfolios;
5) training and support for instructors in the Program, which the reviewers called “outstanding”;
6) use of the GSW rubric for evaluating student writing across all courses and within the Writers Lab: “…the BGSU community should feel confident that grades accurately represent the level of student writing in composition courses in terms of the courses’ criteria and rubrics;”
7) the high quality of the GAs teaching in the Program; and
8) the pleasant environment of East Hall.

Weaknesses Noted by the External Reviewers

GSW and the Department of English. The current relationship between GSW and the Department of English was called “ untenable.” Specifically mentioned were the intermingled budgets, cumbersome staffing procedures, and the make-up of the current policy committee for GSW. Noted too was the English department’s frequent reassignment of GSW staff from GSW courses to courses in the English major, leading to instability in the GSW Program. A key problem is that the Program does not have its own budget, and the Director is not aware of what the potential budget may be from year to year. Hiring for the Program is done through the Chair of English, a practice that adds a layer of bureaucracy to the hiring procedures. The external reviewers also noted that the GSW policy committee contains both the Chair and Assistant Chair of English but no faculty from the rhetoric and composition area.
Demands upon the Administrative Staff. The external reviewers considered the demands upon the administrative staff of GSW overwhelming. The staff is trying to support and train program teachers, run the portfolio evaluation program, provide service presentations and workshops on and off campus, while doing the normal administrative duties related to serving numerous students. The reviewers worried that the “crushing responsibilities” on the Director and her staff could isolate them from faculty peers who could offer new perspectives on the Program. Furthermore, the reviewers pointed out that with rare exceptions the composition courses at BGSU are never taught by permanent faculty. They commented:

…. Bowling Green systematically depends on a migrant faculty to teach the only required course in the University, a course fundamental to students’ academic careers, one that because of the necessary intimacy of class sizes is the University’s front porch to new freshmen.

Relationships with the Department of English. The external reviewers further pointed out that the rhetoric and composition faculty within English are themselves depleted, since several faculty hold administrative appointments. They felt the Department as a whole needed to make this area a high priority for future tenure line hires. The reviewers did not recommend employing additional teaching assistants from programs other than English. They felt such students would not have the analytic sensibility toward the language that is desirable in a teacher of English composition.

Developmental Writing Coordinator. The evaluation team emphasized that placement rates indicate “a great majority of BGSU students…[need] developmental work in writing.” They suggested these large numbers require a coordinator of developmental writing, who would focus on administering ENG 110 and 111. ENG 110 Developmental Writing, in particular, was singled out as a particularly challenging course to teach.

Writing Across the Curriculum Program (WAC). The reviewers also made the important point that successful completion of ENG 112 does not insure that students will retain or improve their writing skills through the remainder of their undergraduate careers. They, therefore, were very supportive of a writing across the curriculum program, arguing that such an approach would assure more writing in upper-division major courses and “change the campus culture to a more focused attention to writing.” At the same time, the reviewers did not feel that such a program should replace the GSW Program but, rather, be a supplement to it. Particularly, they did not recommend replacing ENG 112 with an upper-level English course. They felt that ENG 112 serves its purpose well and has a social value in the first year of university life beyond its obvious skills value. Instead, they argued for upper-division courses in each major (either current courses or new courses) which would require more writing than may currently be the case. They make the excellent point that writing is a skill that needs continual practice. Therefore, the English department alone cannot be expected to be the sole instructors of good writing.
Access to Technology. The external reviewers noted that only a fraction of BGSU students have direct access to technology in their writing courses. This is in comparison, for example, to Illinois State University where all sections of general writing are assigned to computer classrooms. They suggested that, in the future, writing courses will not view the computer as simply an adjunct to traditional methods of teaching writing. Such things as computer graphics will become an integral part of “writing.” Despite this trend, they noted that current syllabi for the few GSW sections that do employ computers are not dramatically different from the syllabi of traditional sections of the same course.

Additional Comments. The reviewers remarked on the “decrepit” housing of the Writers Lab, the need for some pedagogical autonomy for experienced GSW instructors while retaining the excellent structure for teaching now in place, the difficulties in evaluating for tenure the untenured assistant professor who directs the GSW Program, and the low salaries/stipends that GSW administrators and its graduate students receive relative to peers around the country.

Recommendations by the External Review Team

The external team recommended that:
1) GSW receive its own budget, which could be administered by the administrative assistant currently handling the English department budget;
2) GSW do its own hiring;
3) reassignment of teachers from GSW classes to English major classes be the subject of “respectful negotiation”;
4) the GSW committee composition be changed to eliminate the Chair and Associate Chair of English and to add members of the rhetoric and composition faculty (it should be noted that in this recommendation and the one preceding it, the external team did not recommend separating the program from the Department of English);
5) the new instructional assistant for the Program be classified in such a way that the individual in the position could stay longer than five years;
6) re-assessment of upper-level student writing should occur after the students have left the GSW Program;
7) a coordinator of developmental writing for ENG 110 and 111 be hired;
8) student access to up-to-date computers for their writing classes be increased;
9) issues of how writing with computers changes the act of composing be addressed (the reviewers noted that future writing will include more graphic, video, and audio design elements);
10) additional research be done on the current student portfolios as well as on upper-level student writing (they noted that the Program currently does not have the resources to do this additional research);
11) the University not employ non-English majors to teach as GAs in the Program; and
12) the University begin a writing across the curriculum program that would assure more writing in upper-division courses and that a director be appointed to head such a program (capstone courses in each major, other
existing upper-division courses, or new writing courses situated within the major were options suggested).

Program Review Committee Findings

The Program Review Committee has carefully reviewed the self-study prepared by the General Studies Writing Program as well as the report provided by the external review team. The following determinations come from the PRC’s unanimous agreement that Bowling Green State University students should be known for their literacy.

Strengths Noted by the Program Review Committee

It is clear that the General Studies Writing Program is doing an excellent job, given its current situation. Specifically,

1) the Program is admirably serving an annual number of enrollments equivalent to the size of a small college (~6900);

2) those teaching in the Program take pride in its professionalism;

3) the administrative staff of the Program are very dedicated;

4) the sequence between ENG 110, 111, and 112 is clear, and the respective syllabi detailed, useful, and sophisticated; and

5) numerous steps are continually taken to insure quality control, including:
   a) continuous in-service training is offered to new instructional staff;
   b) new instructional staff are monitored;
   c) attention to individual students is provided by both administrators and staff;
   d) a common rubric defines “good” writing across sections, courses, and instructors;
   e) the Program has relatively small classes;
   f) a portfolio of writings represents student learning; and
   g) the student portfolio is independently evaluated by instructional staff in addition to the student’s own instructor.

Areas of Concern Noted by the Program Review Committee

Despite these notable strengths, the following improvements could move the Program (and the writing of BGSU students) to new levels of accomplishment. For instance,

Better integration into the University’s philosophy and practice. Fluency in reading, writing and other communication systems is a key learning outcome that Bowling Green State University desires for its undergraduate students. A second outcome is the ability to think critically. To reach both these goals relative to writing, many facets of the University will need to cooperate. Clearly, the General Studies Writing Program cannot stand alone in this effort. Yet currently,
the GSW Program and its goals do not seem well integrated into the educational philosophy and practice of the University. This lack of integration shows in the relationship of GSW to the general education curriculum, to the undergraduate major curricula, and even to its parent department, English. Specifically,

1) No formal or informal relationship exists between what is taught in General Studies Writing and what is taught in the General Education Program. The same can be said between GSW and the coursework required by the undergraduate major programs on campus.

2) The relationship between GSW and the Department of English is administratively awkward. For instance, GSW does not have its own budget and must ask the Chair of English for all things. In particular, all staffing needs must go through the Chair of English, making hiring a cumbersome procedure. Although the act of writing is at the heart of the rhetoric and composition area, no members of the rhetoric and composition faculty are on the GSW Committee. Although individual faculty members may be supportive, no formal connection exists between GSW and the rhetoric and composition faculty as a whole. Thus, while bound administratively to English, GSW receives only minor, incidental, collegial support or interest from the English faculty.

3) The administrative staffing of the Program is inadequate. The Director is not compensated well for her duties in comparison to others around the country. The administrative staff are overextended by the instructional and service demands on them. Many of these demands come from the instability of a program staffed by part time or one-year, temporary instructors.

Curricular improvements. While the curriculum of GSW received strong praise from the external reviewers, the PRC notes that:

1) the GSW self-study contained no explicit student learning outcomes for the Program or its courses - the outcomes are only implied by the “Specific Skills Taught in the GSW Courses” listed in the Instructor’s Manual;

2) the rates of "passing" in the GSW courses may be unrealistic, given that most of the coursework is developmental or remedial;

3) the GSW program is not preparing enough students for changes that technology may bring to the act of "writing";

4) the large number of students in the developmental courses prior to ENG 112 suggests that many students are entering the University with inadequate writing skills, a problem the University’s administration has apparently not recognized; and

5) the low stipend for Ph.D. GAs (~$10,000) makes recruiting quality student instructors difficult, a general problem that has not been addressed by the
Graduate College; the English department can make a strong case for moving graduate student stipends to the “enhanced” level.

Program Review Committee Recommendations

This section of the review provides recommendations and time lines meant to help the General Studies Writing Program improve its service to the University’s undergraduates and, in so doing, establish a national reputation as a writing program. As stated earlier, the basic premise underlying these recommendations is that the students of Bowling Green State University should be known for their literacy. Since we recognize that the GSW program cannot be solely responsible for the University achieving this goal, we also urge the Provost to institute a writing across the curriculum program and to create an explicit policy on remedial/developmental education at Bowling Green State University.

2001-2002

1) The English department must clarify and improve its relationship to the General Studies Writing Program. The Program Review Committee agrees with the external reviewers that GSW should stay within English. Although the PRC does not review the English department until next year, it seems clear that the department must take more seriously its responsibility for making the relationship between GSW and English work. The rhetoric and composition faculty, in particular, need to see GSW as an outreach integral to their program. To accomplish this goal, we see the English department having two choices in 2001-2002: either it must encourage the current rhetoric and composition faculty to feel responsibility for GSW or it must allocate future personnel lines/resources to new rhetoric and composition faculty who will feel such a responsibility. During the 2001-2002 academic year, progress in this area should involve:
   a) The rhetoric and composition faculty taking responsibility for the GSW Program achieving its learning outcome goals. The main way to do this would be to have one or two rhetoric and composition faculty serve annually on the GSW Committee. We see the committee continuing as a group that gives advice to the Director.
   b) The rhetoric and composition faculty being encouraged to see the GSW Program as an opportunity for research, for themselves and their graduate students.
   c) Rhetoric and composition faculty should assume occasional teaching responsibilities in the Program. A personnel rotation plan should be drafted in 2001-2002.

2) While remaining an integral part of the English department, there is no reason the GSW Program cannot have its own yearly budget, determined by the English department, but administered by the GSW Director. Plans for this budget should be drafted in 2001-2002 for the next fiscal year.
3) **The GSW program needs additional, full time, faculty.** The rhetoric and composition faculty should decide whether these positions will be tenure-track or lecturer lines. They should work with the Chair of English and the Dean of Arts and Sciences to formulate a plan for obtaining those lines as additions to the rhetoric and composition faculty. These positions would be in addition to other rhetoric and composition needs, as long as the faculty continue to display a good faith interest in GSW.

4) **Within GSW itself, the Director and her advisory committee should**

   a) **make explicit the student learning outcomes for all GSW courses.** The criteria for receiving a passing grade in ENG 112 should, in turn, be explicitly related to both the student learning outcomes and the GSW rubric, which represents those outcomes.

   b) **reconsider the standards for passing all GSW courses.** Specifically, is an 80% passing rate appropriate in these courses?

   c) **develop a three-year plan to associate computer laboratory experiences with all GSW courses.** The advisory committee should oversee the revision of syllabi to reflect the influence of technology on writing.

5) The Director of GSW should advocate with the Dean of the Graduate College for competitive stipends, beginning with fall, 2001 and continuing until adequate resources have been secured.

2002-2003

6) **The provost should implement the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Program as a supplement to GSW.** While the PRC does not wish to dictate the contents of such a program, we envision that it would contain some or all of the following:

   a) The WAC Program would encourage all BGSU faculty to understand that the University views them as “teachers of English.” Further, the WAC Program would urge all major programs at BGSU to require their students to produce writing appropriate to their major. Only in this way will students continue to develop their writing skills after passing ENG 112. The PRC envisions that the Director of WAC would work with faculty to produce effective writing experiences in the majors.

   b) The GSW writing rubric (or some version thereof) would be distributed to every department on campus so faculty could become familiar with the document and use it in their own courses.

   c) As part of the WAC Program, capstone courses in each major would assess successful writing as a requirement for passing the course.

   d) The GSW Program would give undergraduates several options in the writing style they are required to master. For instance, it is likely that more departments on campus require students to learn APA style, the publication style advocated by the American Psychological Association, than MLA style.

   e) The Writers Lab, now part of the Academic Enhancement program, would be associated more closely with the GSW Program since it is the
referral resource used by faculty after students leave ENG 112. This would best be done by making the lab an integral part of the WAC Program.

f) The WAC Program would offer incentives to participating faculty from each major or general education course. These incentives could range from increased salaries taken from sequestered merit money to additional teaching assistant or essay reader help to reassigning additional load credit to writing-intensive classes.

7) The GSW Director should assume responsibility for her own GSW budget under the oversight of the Department of English.

8) The GSW program should search for a Developmental Writing Coordinator and a Coordinator of Writing Across the Curriculum. Both coordinators would report to the Director of GSW. Faculty from within English should receive the first opportunities to assume these positions. If such volunteers are found, the department should be reimbursed for the loss of whatever portion of these lines would be dedicated to administration. If outside searches need to be made for one or both lines, these positions should be given to the English department (rather than reallocated from English resources) if the department shows a good faith commitment to GSW. If the latter does not happen, the lines would be taken from English department allocations. Another option would be to fund these positions from Success Challenge money, if it still exists.

2003-2004

9) Relationships between the General Studies Writing Program and other units/programs on campus need to be clarified and strengthened. Specifically, the administrators of GSW and the General Education Program need to create explicit connections between their two programs. For instance, perhaps ENG 112 should be considered part of the General Education Program. At the very least, good writing should be valued and required in general education courses. The GSW rubric should be used in those courses. At the same time, essay topics in GSW courses could reflect content related to general education courses. An example would be essay topics keyed to the values course being suggested for general education. In general education courses with large enrollments, faculty should receive appropriate support for the additional work that essay evaluation will cause. Possible incentives have been enumerated in the section on the WAC Program, previously.

10) The large number of students in the developmental courses prior to ENG 112 suggests that most students are entering the University with inadequate writing skills. We recommend that the Provost develop an explicit policy on remedial or developmental education at BGSU. This policy should weigh the costs/benefits of admitting under-prepared students. Meanwhile, the GSW Program should request Success Challenge monies for its developmental writing courses.
11) Peer tutoring of students in developmental courses should be encouraged by the GSW Program. Education majors specializing in English could be particularly recruited for practicum experiences.

2004-2005

12) The University should consider a cooperative outreach to state elementary and high schools to improve the level of writing instruction in K-12 schools. Such an outreach should be spearheaded by the College of Education and Human Development in cooperation with the Department of English. Opportunities for external funding of such a project should be available. The cooperating units are encouraged to apply this academic year, if not before.

13) The GSW Committee should devise a periodic method for evaluating the Director of GSW. This evaluation would be in addition to any annual review mandated by the Director’s academic status in the Department of English. The review should address the Director’s administrative abilities. Procedures governing the review should include soliciting input from the Program’s university-wide constituencies. Results of the review should be sent directly to the Dean of Arts and Sciences.

2005-2007

14) In these two academic years, the GSW advisory committee and the GSW Director should assess the progress of the Program and project a two-year plan that will prepare the Program for its next program review.

The General Studies Writing Program should report annually to the Chair of English and the Dean of Arts & Sciences, with a copy to the Provost, on the implementation of these recommendations.