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Writing Implementation Committee, Illinois Wesleyan University

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Writing Committee Minutes Wed., Feb. 26, 2014

Convened at 4:05 p.m.

Present: Chris Sweet, Diego Mendez-Carbajo, Karen Schmidt, Mary Ann Bushman, Carole Myscofski, Joel Haefner

The meeting opened with consideration of three grant proposals, two for course revision and one assignment mini-grant. All three were approved.

The consideration of these proposals also engendered a discussion of whether grant money could be used for senior seminar revisions. A consensus was quickly reached that curricular innovation, including information literacy strategies, was targeted by the two apropos submissions, and further that one of the two tracks of the grant was the strengthening of upper-division writing courses; hence, using grant money for these proposals was entirely justified.

Concomitantly, Diego urged that the website clearly announce deadlines and Chris suggested we reiterate that previous grantees were eligible to re-apply for grants. Mary Ann undertook to beef up publicity for the grants.

The committee then turned to the next agenda item, a draft proposal for revising the Gateway Symposium.

The draft proposal was generally well-received by the committee, but there was discussion of several “flash points”, that is, points of possible contention.

Staffing was one such point. The draft proposal includes a staffing formula earlier proposed by Frank Boyd, which pretty closely follows current patterns. There was some discussion of an enforcement policy practiced at some of our peer institutions—no sabbatical unless the faculty member had taught a First Year Seminar (FYS) in the last six years—but committee sentiment was that such a proposal would be poorly received on campus.

Several committee members were optimistic that strong upper administrative support would catalyze change in the Gateway program.

Joel observed that broadening the number of faculty who teach a FYS—a goal of any WAC program—would necessitate a more intensive and mandatory training/orientation workshop. This would address the argument by many faculty, as Diego, Carole and other committee members observed, that they were not trained to teach writing.

The committee also discussed (relatively briefly) the question of supervision of faculty teaching of a future FYS. The current supervisory practices of department chairs were discussed and their applicability to the evaluation of FYS teaching. An advisory role for the Writing Program Director and/or the Writing Committee was also broached.

There was extensive dialogue about the question of Gen Ed or major/minor credit. Carole reported that she had raised the issue with humanities faculty on the first floor of CLA, and that among those there was general consensus that FYS should not be an introduction to discipline course, and further that any FYS should bear only two Gen Ed attributes—either two flags or a flag and a category. Diego indicated that in some cases, such as his department, a case could be made for a FYS that could be counted as an elective in the major. There were, however, several more arguments against counting a FYS as disciplinary credit and in favor of counting a FYS as Gen Ed credit. Among these arguments: that a Gen Ed FYS would attract a mix of students, instead of students focused on a major; that a Gen Ed FYS would better support a WAC model; that a Gen Ed FYS replacing the Gateway requirement would reduce Gen Ed required credits by one and open up another elective for students; and that many departments could not make a FYS work in the framework of their disciplinary curriculum.

It was also noted that this moment is opportune for Gateway reform. With 200 fewer students targeted for enrollment, the motivation for the original Gateway program (adding faculty lines for the teaching load) is moot; in fact, offering faculty to teach FYS would be a solid argument for sustaining faculty lines. Carole suggested that, if the draft proposal were to be adopted, that some statistics on the number of seats available in each Gen Ed category would be helpful; several committee members noted that Intellectual Traditions was an under-utilized category.

Mary Ann undertook to report the committee discussion to AS and CC, the next procedural step for the draft proposal.

Meeting adjourned at 4:56 p.m.

Submitted by: J. Haefner