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Writing Implementation Committee, Illinois Wesleyan University

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Present: Marcia Thomas, Karen Schmidt, Chris Sweet, Carole Myscofski, Mary Ann Bushman, Joel Haefner, Diego Mendez-Carbajo, Ilario Ossella-Durbal

Convened at: 3:33 p.m.

The meeting opened with a discussion of remaining funds for course/assignment development grants from the Mellon Foundation grant, which ends January 1. Mary Ann noted that there was $39,000 left for any curricular development grants.

Mary Ann also announced that the SLAC-WPA conference was being hosted by IWU on Jan. 9-10 2015. Librarians from attending schools may well participate. Joe Bizup was likely to be the keynote speaker, and one of his presentations would be open to the Wesleyan faculty.

Mary Ann then broached the topic of the call for a new Writing Program Director; she will step down after the above-mentioned conference. Carole expressed concern about the call for the position, since there were only two course releases and no stipend offered. Mary Ann indicated this was the provost’s decision. No applicants have applied thus far; the deadline is Oct. 15. There was also a question about whether the Director’s department gets credit if he/she teaches a Gateway; the answer is yes.

Mary Ann noted that the assessment project and curricular change (requiring a WI course before the end of the sophomore year) were significant changes to the writing program. She noted that the new director would have to focus on the Gateway Symposium, since last year’s proposals did not gain traction. Carole wondered if this result was somehow tied to the fate of a proposal for honors in the humanities.

Diego then presented a summary of the data from the May 2014 scoring of freshman papers. Holistic scores for both freshmen and seniors correlated most with the Audience dimension, and least with the Engagement dimension, suggesting that the former was most valued by readers and the latter least. For first year students, the second most correlated dimension was Evidence and the third most correlated was Context; for seniors, the second most correlated dimension was Context and the third most correlated was Implications. On the plus side, Diego noted, readers are correlated the holistic score more closely with all the dimensions since 2010. Joel and Mary Ann suggested that discussing student engagement in writing may be a productive focus for faculty development events in the near future.

A discussion followed as to whether we should continue with the yearly student paper collection and scoring. The consensus of the committee was that our quantitative direct outcomes program should continue. This year’s target group will be mid-career students (sophomores and juniors), and Joel indicated he would now initiate the IRB process.
Chris presented a summary of the librarians’ assessment event. Librarians generated their own rubric, and read some 50 papers. The committee was presented with both the rubric and the raw data; some analysis of the data will be soon undertaken.

The committee then discussed the issue of how to communicate assessment data to faculty; Mary Ann had identified this as the biggest problem with the Writing Program’s assessment plan. Diego noted that non-orgs were not well attended, and that Curriculum Council had too full an agenda to respond to assessment data, and that both outlets limited faculty feedback. Mary Ann said that some attention must be paid to administrative hierarchy in releasing assessment conclusions. Diego suggested the new faculty orientation and lunches for new faculty. Marcia also commented that assessment data might get more traction at the departmental level—that is, it should be presented at departmental meetings. Mary Ann indicated she might undertake that.

One application for a mini-grant to revise an assignment integrating writing and information literacy was approved.

Mary Ann indicated the next meeting would be in the third or fourth week of October, unless needed earlier.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:31 p.m.

Submitted by: J. Haefner