

Program Review
Hendrix College
Campus Writing Programs

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December 2008

I appreciated the opportunity to visit with Hendrix College faculty, students, and staff and enjoy your wonderful hospitality (November 2008). From my conversations and observations, I learned a great deal regarding the ways writing plays a role on your campus. My goal for this report is to let you know what I perceived: what works well now, what requires attention, what requires assessment, what requires enhancement, and what requires significant change. In all of these realms, I include ideas and suggestions that, obviously, you are free to consider or not. Overall, as an outside evaluator, I would say your programs—the writing center, the first year writing courses, the Odyssey imitative, and the twin first year seminars, Journeys and Explorations—are providing sound and engaging instruction consistent not only with what a liberal arts college values but also with the kind of material and focus many larger public universities have moved to in recent years. The turn to first year student seminars—whether topic-based, common reading-based, writing intensive, or orientation-to-college-based—indicates the increased focus on transitions and development for students.

Overview:

Hendrix College is in growth mode, with projections for increased enrollment (perhaps up to 2,000 students) and increased hiring of tenure track faculty. Planned growth of this type can be either simply managed or it can in fact provide the impetus for a focus on a specific area of the curriculum and its related area of student learning. If writing were chosen as this area, I believe embedding writing more deeply into the recent initiatives, such as Odyssey and the Collegiate Center courses, is the place to start. Murphy Program funds can enhance the effort, from funding

a new line, to offering incentives and rewards for faculty development, to seeding a pilot project for e-portfolios.

The self-study written by Professor Hines is a good starting point for the discussions. I suggest a faculty retreat that brings the advisory council together with other campus leaders.

Essentially, I recommend that W1 become the full first year of the seminar sequence Journeys and Explorations, and I recommend that students continue to choose a W2 as required for graduation. Oversight of each W2 course curriculum, as it relates to writing, must be addressed. The Jr level research courses and Transitions could also be brought under this umbrella for oversight, assessment, and enhanced faculty development. Perhaps a first step would be developing a full faculty survey to assess the viability of these ideas.

Universal Writing Experience:

Because of the size and mission of Hendrix, I find it entirely possible that your first year course sequence of Journeys and Explorations could become the de facto universal writing requirement (Level I is now a full year with these courses). As I understand it, students cannot use AP or other transfer credits for Level I or Level II now, so this would not be major shift.

A new writing specialist could lead faculty from all over your campus and inject common expectations for writing into the first year courses. Taking your English 110 off the books and eliminating the need for any placement decisions would free up English faculty to take part in Journeys and Explorations on a rotating basis (along with a cohort of instructors from other departments) and send the message that teaching academic writing is not solely the responsibility of the English department faculty.

Future Position:

It is my impression, and the impression of others with whom I spoke, that Alice Hines has been the single most consistent force for writing on campus. Yet over these past 20 years, she has been stretched to her maximum capability across several important initiatives. The model that could be developed would allow Professor Hines to continue in an advisory role over the campus

writing program but entrust a new writing specialist with the overall writing program as their primary position.

My suggestion is to begin to (but not rush to) look for a Ph.D. or M.F.A. with experience in writing program administration, a person who can come in and work at the same institutional level as other first year program leaders (Odyssey, for example or Liberal Studies, where Journeys and Explorations are currently housed; placing this person as connected to the English faculty makes sense as well). Perhaps this person could report to David Sutherland; in that way, all writing initiatives, from Journeys, etc. through all other writing intensive courses across campus, could be brought in line with a core set of outcomes for students. Assessment of writing should also become more visible. Exploring the potential of electronic portfolios is one way to begin a discussion of more visible assessment. I include in the appendix some information on e-portfolios.

Several of my colleagues who teach at small liberal arts colleges (Wheaton MA, Clark MA, Coe, etc.) have told me that programs at Duke, Syracuse, Pittsburgh, and Columbia are preparing M.F.A. students for writing specialist roles, and these graduate students are more likely to have come from liberal arts colleges. There is a small but growing group of liberal arts college writing center directors, and that may be a place to start discussion and recruitment.

When I described to one colleague the type of person I believe would be the “right fit” for a school like Hendrix, capable of doing the kind of work I am describing in this report, an actual name was mentioned. (Example profile: <http://gustavus.edu/profiles/blawley>) I see this as confirmation that with some active recruitment, the right bright person can be attracted to Hendrix to help lead a campus-wide writing initiative.

Advisory Council:

The faculty group that makes up the “advisory council” on writing needs to be formalized and “re-charged,” and by “re-charged” I mean both charged with a fresh agenda by the Provost and also considered the home base for writing issues on campus. The leader of this group should be an energetic and effective facilitator who is familiar with action plans and working groups. In

this model, small teams can take on deadline-driven projects such as the feasibility of taking English 110 off the books, recruiting a new writing specialist, and faculty development for teaching writing intensive courses. “Workshop fatigue” is a real issue; a strong faculty leader might be able to re-invent faculty development activities that are tied directly to the writing initiative so that workshops are not the only delivery method. I also think, because Hendrix prepares so many future medical professionals, that a senior faculty member in the sciences could be a strong addition to the advisory board. In this way, writing may become more of a tool for learning in the sciences as well. This kind of integration prevents students from viewing their writing classes (a bland requirement) and their science classes (in their perception: their real work) as unrelated and irrelevant to each other.

English Language Learners:

Hiring Professor Stevens was seen as a way to provide needed assistance to Professor Hines in the writing center, but I believe Professor Stevens will soon have a full plate of her own. I am impressed with the plans to bring more international students to Hendrix (from Rwanda, etc.), but I can predict that she soon will be working full time on this growing program. That said, the program can and should still be tied to the writing center. My caution is that because she will be in demand to develop programs for international students, it is unlikely she will be able make a significant contribution to the writing center. Perhaps a graduate internship could be developed that would attract local graduate students to work with Professor Stevens and with the writing center.

Writing Center:

The space is small, but that is not the primary barrier to its potential. The writing center must brand itself, reach out to the campus. Most writing centers use a graphic recognition (logos, mascots, etc.) to create a look and feel in both their materials and online. The outreach is usually student-centered, based on an assessment of the student culture and student needs. The writing center must ask: what would prompt a Hendrix student to utilize our writing center? What do we offer that can attract Hendrix students? A typical target goal for revitalizing a writing center (after re-branding, hiring and training more students, reaching out to students in a culturally

congruent way, and developing a policy that visits should not be mandated by faculty) is that the number of visits by year three should exceed 10% of the student population. In small schools like Hendrix, is it not uncommon for a writing center to see their entire student population pass through the door at least once a year.

In the close environment of a small college, I don't see a need for satellites or sophisticated online services; access is not the issue. But the center seems to be hidden, and not just physically. I was somewhat troubled (but not surprised, given Professor Hines' workload) that there was no infrastructure of staff education and development. The work students do in the writing center (and there certainly should be more of them working there) should be based on a solid body of materials available for training meetings, retreats, and sometimes credit-based courses. As happens in some schools, the writing tutors have not been introduced to the larger field that includes numerous books, articles, and examples on web sites as well. In other words, the students are underprepared for their work, and there is not an ongoing staff education agenda. The few students working there do not meet all together; I did not sense a community or investment. Although I don't doubt that they are doing a fine job when they meet with students, I believe they could be doing a better job.

I am not blaming Professor Hines here; this is a matter of institutional resources and priorities. If Hendrix wants to say it has a writing center and writing across the curriculum, these programs should be supported in visible ways. Coe College, for example, actually recruits students at admission and offers scholarships for students who commit to working in the writing center. A larger pool of student funds for undergraduate peer tutors needs to be developed. If Odyssey plans to turn some of the outreach activity more toward the campus itself, this is an area to explore for student service learning projects. Also, Odyssey might offer writing fellowships so that students can work within courses they have taken already and assist students in those courses with writing. Collaborations with local colleges could also spur an exchange that would benefit both parties.

Summary:

Student writing at Hendrix is no doubt quite good already due to their preparation profile, but to instill a deeper understanding of content material through writing, and to create lifelong learning that involves writing, writing must be infused into the whole curriculum. The critical thinking students must do in the future, especially in the demanding professional careers they are preparing for at Hendrix, can be strengthened by intensive writing experiences in the undergraduate curriculum. With the current commitment, and with future resources devoted to this effort, writing can become a signature feature of student life at Hendrix.

An even stronger commitment by administrators and faculty will be necessary to make this effort visible and fiscally sustainable. The foundation is set. Building on it will take some deliberate planning and dedicated leadership, and I believe Hendrix can do this with the help of the Murphy Program.

APPENDIX I

Webfolio Project
D. Reiss

Selected Electronic Portfolio Resources

American Association for Higher Education Electronic Portfolios Webcenter. This evolving site includes a clearinghouse for electronic portfolio initiatives, a taxonomy for developers, and many other resources.

Barrett, Helen. *Using Technology to Support Alternative Assessment and Electronic Portfolios*. School of Education, University of Alaska Anchorage. This site includes links to Barrett's presentations and papers on portfolios for teachers and students as well as an extensive annotated bibliography on educational portfolios at every level.

Day, Michael, and others. Webfolio Central (assessment and faculty development) and Student-Writing Portfolios (student research report) were coordinated by M. Day of Northern Illinois University.

ePortfolio Consortium at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI) includes individual and institutional e-portfolio information and resources.

Cambridge, Barbara, ed. *Emerging Practices: Electronic Portfolio Learning for Students, Faculty, and Institutions*. Washington, DC: AAHE, 2001. This collection may be the first to focus entirely on digital portfolios. I was honored to be invited to submit a chapter about my Webfolio Project.

Fitch, Kathy. Webfolio Resources. This site for a faculty workshop includes planning ideas as well as resources for assessing and designing electronic portfolios.

Kalamazoo [Michigan] College Portfolio. When I first read about this early institutional portfolio project, I modified the concept for the College Page Template top level of my students' portfolio project, never mind that my college doesn't actually have institutional portfolios yet.

Reiss, Donna. "Reflective Webfolios in a Humanities Class." *Emerging Practices: Electronic Portfolio Learning for Students, Faculty, and Institutions*. 31-36. Barbara Cambridge, ed. Washington, DC: AAHE, 2001. My chapter describes my *TCC Webfolio Project* with particular attention to reflective writing and student publication in a humanities elective, Technology and the Liberal Arts.

Syverson, M. A. *Beyond Portfolios: The Online Learning Record*. Computer Writing and Research Lab, University of Texas at Austin. Students participate actively in evaluating their writing and learning with a process based on five "dimensions of learning."

<http://www.cuttingedge.rmit.edu.au/home.html>. Originally designed to support women in education and other professions in development of multimedia career portfolios, this Australian project offers workshops for planning and production.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake, and Irwin Weiser, eds. *Situating Portfolios: Four Perspectives*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1997. Part Four offers five chapters about electronic portfolios for reflection and assessment.

Zubizarreta, John. *The Learning Portfolio: Reflective Practice for Improving Student Learning*. Bolton: Anker, 2003 (in press). His extensive [bibliography of electronic learning portfolio Websites](#) has been placed online by the Michigan State University Teaching Assistant Program.

[Webfolio Project](#) | [Templates](#) | **Portfolio Resources**

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APPENDIX II

WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition

Adopted by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA), April 2000

A version of this statement was published in

WPA: Writing Program Administration 23.1/2 (fall/winter 1999): 59-66

Introduction

This statement describes the common knowledge, skills, and attitudes sought by first-year composition programs in American postsecondary education. To some extent, we seek to regularize what can be expected to be taught in first-year composition; to this end the document is not merely a compilation or summary of what currently takes place. Rather, the following statement articulates what composition teachers nationwide have learned from practice, research, and theory. This document intentionally defines only "outcomes," or types of results, and not "standards," or precise levels of achievement. The setting of standards should be left to specific institutions or specific groups of institutions.

Learning to write is a complex process, both individual and social, that takes place over time with continued practice and informed guidance. Therefore, it is important that teachers, administrators, and a concerned public do not imagine that these outcomes can be taught in reduced or simple ways. Helping students demonstrate these outcomes requires expert understanding of how students actually learn to write. For this reason we expect the primary audience for this document to be well-prepared college writing teachers and college writing program administrators. In some places, we have chosen to write in their professional language. Among such readers, terms such as "rhetorical" and "genre" convey a rich meaning that is not easily simplified. While we have also aimed at writing a document that the general public can understand, in limited cases we have aimed first at communicating effectively with expert writing teachers and writing program administrators.

These statements describe only what we expect to find at the end of first-year composition, at most schools a required general education course or sequence of courses. As writers move beyond first-year composition, their writing abilities do not merely improve. Rather, students' abilities not only diversify along disciplinary and professional lines but also move into whole new levels where expected outcomes expand, multiply, and diverge. For this reason, each statement of outcomes for first-year composition is followed by suggestions for further work that builds on these outcomes.

Rhetorical Knowledge

By the end of first year composition, students should

- Focus on a purpose
- Respond to the needs of different audiences
- Respond appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations
- Use conventions of format and structure appropriate to the rhetorical situation
- Adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality
- Understand how genres shape reading and writing
- Write in several genres

Faculty in all programs and departments can build on this preparation by helping students learn

- The main features of writing in their fields
- The main uses of writing in their fields
- The expectations of readers in their fields

Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing

By the end of first year composition, students should

- Use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating
- Understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources
- Integrate their own ideas with those of others
- Understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power

Faculty in all programs and departments can build on this preparation by helping students learn

- The uses of writing as a critical thinking method
- The interactions among critical thinking, critical reading, and writing
- The relationships among language, knowledge, and power in their fields

Processes

By the end of first year composition, students should

- Be aware that it usually takes multiple drafts to create and complete a successful text
- Develop flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading

- Understand writing as an open process that permits writers to use later invention and re-thinking to revise their work
- Understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes
- Learn to critique their own and others' works
- Learn to balance the advantages of relying on others with the responsibility of doing their part
- Use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences

Faculty in all programs and departments can build on this preparation by helping students learn

- To build final results in stages
- To review work-in-progress in collaborative peer groups for purposes other than editing
- To save extensive editing for later parts of the writing process
- To apply the technologies commonly used to research and communicate within their fields

Knowledge of Conventions

By the end of first year composition, students should

- Learn common formats for different kinds of texts
- Develop knowledge of genre conventions ranging from structure and paragraphing to tone and mechanics
- Practice appropriate means of documenting their work
- Control such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Faculty in all programs and departments can build on this preparation by helping students learn

- The conventions of usage, specialized vocabulary, format, and documentation in their fields
- Strategies through which better control of conventions can be achieved