The Final Report of the Writing Task Force is available online at:

NOTE: To access the report as a PDF file, you must have the Adobe Acrobat Reader
loaded on your computer. For instructions about how to download a free copy of the
Acrobat Reader, see http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html.
CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..................................................... 3

PART 1 — BACKGROUND, GUIDING CRITERIA, PROCESS ...... 5
   The Current Undergraduate Writing Requirement .............. 5
   The Charge of the Writing Task Force ............................ 5
   Membership .................................................................. 6
   Guiding Criteria and Questions .................................... 6
   Process and Methodology Overview ............................... 7

PART 2 — PRINCIPLES, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS ...... 9
   The Role of Writing in Public and Professional Life .......... 9
   The Role of Writing in the Liberal Arts and Sciences ....... 10
   Overall Recommendations ........................................... 12
   Tier I Findings and Recommendations ............................ 15
   Tier II Findings and Recommendations ........................... 23

ATTACHMENTS

   Appendix A — Members of the Writing Task Force .......... 27
   Appendix B — ASMSU Support for Two-Semester Requirement . 28

Online Appendix — Supporting Material for Final Report
http://www.rhetoric.msu.edu/writing_task_force/WTF_FinalAppendix.html

   Tier I Subcommittee Final Report

   Tier II Subcommittee Final Report
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A key foundational principle about writing, writing instruction, and the role of writing in the undergraduate curriculum is widely shared at Michigan State University: Writing and communication skills matter in all fields, disciplines, and professional areas, and they also matter in civic life. Writing and communication abilities are a sine qua non of the college-educated person — and they should be taught as an integral facet of a liberal arts education. All Michigan State University graduates should be competent writers (and speakers), able to write and speak effectively in a variety of situations and to a variety of audiences, able to write and speak competently within their professional area, and able to write and speak effectively and persuasively as citizens in the public arena.

The current undergraduate writing curriculum at Michigan State University has many good qualities. The Final Report of the Writing Task Force identifies those features of the curriculum which are strong and which should be maintained; it also identifies weaknesses and suggests necessary improvements, based on what the faculty and students support and based on what is practically feasible. Given its current strengths, by implementing strategic improvements Michigan State University could rapidly develop an excellent undergraduate writing curriculum for a university of its size and mission — a premier writing curriculum that could become a distinctive feature of the undergraduate experience at Michigan State University.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The University should retain (but improve) the Tier I/Tier II model, which commits to the principle that teaching and promoting writing and communication competencies are the responsibility of the entire faculty, and of all programs, departments, and majors. The intention of the current Tier I/Tier II model is fundamentally sound, but the model requires additional support and coordination to make it work effectively.

2. The University should create a University-level writing committee and appoint a University Director of Writing. When the Joint Committee on Writing Requirements created the Tier I/Tier II model in 1991, it did not provide a distinct mechanism for overseeing and coordinating the model or for representing and advocating the needs of writing across campus. The Tier I/Tier II model will only work if the University provides a mechanism for supporting it, evaluating it, and improving it over time.

3. The University should maintain — and, if possible, expand — its commitment to staffing Tier I and Tier II writing courses with full-time and tenure-stream faculty. One of the distinctive, even impressive, features of the overall writing curriculum is the significant involvement of full-time faculty in both Tier I and Tier II instruction.

4. Tier I and Tier II writing courses should provide students with instruction in writing, not merely be “writing-intensive courses” in which writing is assigned but not explicitly taught.

5. The University should offer more classes in which writing is taught in conjunction with oral and visual communication competencies. Many departments and colleges expressed a strong preference for an integrated approach to written and oral communication; many departments in fact use an integrated approach in their Tier II courses.

6. The University should promote faculty efforts to integrate technology into writing courses and provide the technological support for them to do so. Writing in the 21st century is, increasingly, online, computer-based writing — and it is important that the curriculum promote an expanded notion of writing as including web-based authoring, electronic publishing (in a variety of forms and genres), graphics, audio, video, and the digital media arts in general.
7. Faculty should be encouraged to assign more writing in their courses. Colleges, departments, programs, and the University as a whole should promote, support, and reward faculty efforts to do so. Students need more opportunities to write throughout their undergraduate education, not only in designated Tier I and Tier II courses. This effort, which would require considerable time and commitment by faculty, will only happen if the University as a whole provides incentives, new forms of support, and encouragement for faculty who do so.

8. Writing/communication should prepare students to be effective citizens, skilled communicators in public life, as well as effective professionals.

9. The University should provide more specialized courses and additional support services for students who need additional help with writing and language development — in particular, students whose primary language is not English and students from disadvantaged economic or academic backgrounds.

10. The University should commit to ongoing evaluation of the general education writing curriculum and of the writing programs and other systems supporting that curriculum.

**TIER I RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Tier I Subcommittee recommends a set of coordinated improvements in the Tier I curriculum.

1. Ensure curricular consistency through assessment and accountability. While both faculty and students report that they appreciate having a rich selection of Tier I writing courses, both faculty and students indicated that more consistency and accountability for outcomes within and across current first-year WRAC course offerings are needed.

2. Expand the Tier I writing requirement. The Subcommittee proposes that the Tier I writing requirement be expanded from the current 4 credits to 6 credits (2 courses) in order to deepen and broaden student-professor contact, to afford students intensive and extensive experience with writing, and to ensure that all students get the necessary range of writing experience and instruction needed to be successful in their majors, disciplines, and academic fields.

3. Articulate course descriptions and outcomes within WRAC departmental curriculum committees.

4. Improve work conditions for fixed-term faculty teaching Tier I.

5. Develop and support the use of wireless writing classrooms.

6. Create expanded and integrative professional development opportunities within WRAC.

**TIER II RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Tier II Subcommittee recommends that departments, programs, colleges, and the University at large adopt, implement, regularly assess, and continually revise a model for writing in the disciplines that builds on the ideas expressed in the 1991 Joint Commission on Writing Report.

1. Create a university-wide faculty committee — the Tier II Advisory Committee (TAC) — responsible for working with the Writing Center to foster continuous improvement of students’ communication.

2. Develop systematic outcomes-based and assessment-driven plans for the further development of student writers.

3. Provide additional direct support for Tier II writing courses and faculty at departmental and college levels.

4. Charge the Writing Center to offer additional support for Tier II faculty, to help departments revise Tier II plans, and to provide additional tutoring services for students in Tier II courses.
THE CURRENT UNDERGRADUATE WRITING REQUIREMENT

Currently, all students at Michigan State University who receive the bachelor’s degree are required to complete the University writing requirement, as specified in the Academic Program catalog (under Graduation Requirements for Undergraduate Education).

Briefly, the University writing requirements specify that each student must complete:

- the Tier I writing requirement, which consists either of (a) one 4-credit Tier I writing course (typically taken within the student’s first year), or (b) if the placement mechanism warrants, the developmental writing courses (WRA 0102, WRA 1004) plus one 4-credit Tier I writing course. Most MSU students meet their Tier I requirement by taking one of the Tier I writing courses offered in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures (formerly, American Thought and Language). James Madison College and Lyman Briggs School each provides its own distinct Tier I courses for students in those programs.

Regarding Tier I Placements. In AY 2003-2004, 5,795 first-year MSU students (86%) enrolled in the WRAC Tier I writing courses. Another 250 students (4%) took the Preparation for College Writing course. A total of 711 students (10%) was exempted from the Tier I requirement. (Students who receive a score of 4 or 5 on the AP Composition exam are granted credit for Tier I; students who receive a score of 3 on the exam can waive Tier I.)

- the Tier II writing requirement, which consists of a course or courses within the student’s academic major and degree program. “This requirement involves writing in the student’s discipline and is met by completing either: (a) one or more 300-400 level Tier II writing courses as specified for the student’s academic major and degree program; or (b) a cluster of 300-400 level courses that involve writing experiences that are approved as the Tier II writing requirement for the student’s academic major and degree program.”

This Tier I/Tier II model was originally developed by the Joint Committee on Writing Requirements and subsequently approved by Academic Council on January 8, 1991. The Joint Committee report provides detailed guidelines for the purpose and design of Tier I and Tier II writing courses.

THE CHARGE OF THE WRITING TASK FORCE

On March 16, 2004, the Executive Committee of Academic Council (ECAC) directed that a planning committee be appointed to review writing in the undergraduate curriculum. The current Writing Task Force is the result of that directive.

Specifically, the Writing Task Force was charged:

- To review pertinent local and national documents relevant to current practice in first-year writing instruction and assessment

- To review the status of existing writing instruction across the university, including writing embedded in study abroad programs, Tier II courses, and in professional schools/majors curricula
• To conduct focus groups with faculty and students involved in current instruction which identify issues in/with writing instruction

• To review current WRAC (ATL) placement and remediation practices and their effectiveness

• To make recommendations for assessing outcomes of the writing program on an ongoing basis

• To review the relationship of Tier I writing to integrative studies (completed in conjunction with the review committee on integrative studies)

At the conclusion of its inquiry, in November 2004, the Writing Task Force was also asked to provide:

• A summary of findings related to review of current practice

• Recommendations for possible modifications of the writing curriculum

MEMBERSHIP

The Writing Task Force consists of 35 members (28 faculty, 1 academic specialist, 3 graduate students, and 3 undergraduates) divided into three working groups: the Coordinating Committee, the Tier I Subcommittee, and the Tier II Subcommittee. Because the Writing Task Force was directed to explore the overall University general education writing requirement (both Tier I and Tier II), the membership of the Writing Task Force represents the entire University community. Representatives from 10 different colleges serve on the Task Force. At the same time, because the work of the Task Force is focused on questions of writing and writing instruction, it was important to include a significant number of faculty members with expertise in writing, language, literacy, and communication. (See Appendix A for complete list of Task Force members.)

GUIDING CRITERIA AND QUESTIONS

In conducting its inquiry the Writing Task Force was guided by a shared understanding about the importance of faculty self-determination, as well as by two other overall concerns. (These two concerns echo the main criteria listed by the Joint Committee on Writing Requirements in its 1991 report.)

1. Student needs and outcomes. What is best for students? What kind of curricular design will address students’ needs as writers and help them achieve the highest level of writing competence possible by the time of their graduation from MSU?

2. Faculty strengths and interests. What are the current strengths and expertise of faculty at MSU? How can those strengths be best deployed? What are faculty interested in doing and willing to do?

In addition, budgetary realities and practical constraints were also important to our deliberations: What changes and improvements are most cost effective? What improvements can be made at little or no cost? What improvements are easiest or most practical to implement? However, although budgetary criteria guided our thinking, explicit discussion of budgetary implications is not provided in this Final Report — because, as our charge indicates, “[p]ending acceptance of these recommendations, an implementation group will be charged with developing a curricular plan, addressing questions of instructor and TA training, and making recommendations for needed resources, including technology.”

Two particular overall questions guided our thinking during this curriculum review:
**What is working well?** Our inquiry wanted to discover, first, what is effective about the current curriculum. What do students and faculty like or think is working well? What features of the program should be maintained? What are the distinctive strengths of the program at MSU?

**What can be improved?** We wanted to explore how the curriculum could be strengthened. Are there weaknesses, inadequacies, or gaps in the current curriculum? Are there ways in which MSU’s program does not meet national or peer institution norms? Are there problems of concern to students and faculty?

**PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW**

The Writing Task Force consisted of three working groups — the Coordinating Committee, the Tier I Subcommittee, and the Tier II. Each of these groups had a unique charge and designed its own distinctive methodology (discussed below).

The main focus of the Task Force was to research the current writing curriculum at MSU, as well as student and faculty perceptions of the curriculum and its effectiveness. The process included external as well as internal information, including reviewing research in literacy and composition studies, professional standards, and peer institution programs, as well as on-campus research involving personal interviews, faculty surveys, student focus groups, and the examination of syllabi, curricular material, and previous reports about writing at MSU. The three committees shared research throughout the process.

The Writing Task Force began its work in April 2004. Throughout the process, the Coordinating Committee interacted with the two subcommittees through three subcommittee chairs who also served on the Coordinating Committee. The entire Writing Task Force met twice during its process: first in a day-long retreat on August 16th and then again on November 9th for a final meeting to consider revisions for the Final Report.

**COORDINATING COMMITTEE**

The Coordinating Committee made decisions about process and membership, coordinated whole Task Force meetings, conducted college-level meetings across campus (with deans, associate deans, and chairs), and integrated the subcommittee reports to write the Draft Report and the Final Report of the Writing Task Force. The Coordinating Committee was primarily responsible for distributing information and making the work of the Task Force visible to the University community and for collecting feedback during the process.

Starting in August, the Coordinating Committee conducted a series of “college-level meetings” intended to collect input from chairs, associate deans, and deans about the role and impact of the general education writing curriculum within their colleges. In August and September, the Committee met with representatives from the Colleges of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Communication Arts & Sciences, Arts & Letters (2 times), Natural Science, James Madison, Engineering, and Nursing. The Committee also held four Public Forums (advertised to the entire University community) and made presentations to the Academic Council of the University, to the Associated Students of MSU, and at the “Student Success Conference.” In addition to these meetings and presentations, the Coordinating Committee met on its own 12 times between May and November 2004.

**TIER I SUBCOMMITTEE**

The charge of the Tier I Subcommittee was to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the University’s existing first-year writing (FYW) sequence and to make recommendations to enhance student learning in these courses, including options for course design, implementation, staffing, student placement and assessment. To this end, the Subcommittee sought, first, to accurately describe existing policy and teaching at MSU. It gathered information and data about peer institutions’ policies and practices for FYW sequences in order to determine which practices, if applied to MSU, would best serve MSU students’ needs. The Subcommittee reviewed research on writing and policy in order to ground its
thinking about present practice and to shape suggestions for future changes. Committee members conducted relevant research and met regularly to review this data as a group. Specifically, the Subcommittee:

• reviewed 25 randomly selected WRAC 110-150 course syllabi to determine what learning objectives and pedagogical or theoretical approaches were most consistently listed and utilized in these courses;
• gathered documents to form a picture of the current institutional situation with respect to FYW at MSU;
• consulted standards outcomes statements developed by professional organizations within rhetoric/composition, literacy studies, and English education (National Council of Teachers of English) and Composition and Rhetoric (Conference on College Composition and Communication, Council of Writing Program Administrators);
• collected program information to learn what first-year writing instruction looks like at peer and competing institutions; this information came from program literature and websites, from interviews with writing program administrators and program directors, and from research and professional recommendations from the 2004 Writing Program Administrators Conference and Assessment Institute;
• created a chart detailing how 15 other FYW programs, including Big Ten institutions, presently structure writing instruction for their students; the Subcommittee reviewed and compared course requirements, first-year writing sequences, models of placement and exemption, delivery approaches, means of staffing, approaches to teacher training, and articulations of course outcomes;
• reviewed research and literature on literacy and composing;
• reviewed data on class size in diverse FYW programs across the United States; and
• created and administered a survey of WRAC faculty to discover faculty experiences with and assessments of the current Tier I curriculum and to learn what kinds of improvements in first-year writing faculty see as necessary and valuable (52 writing teachers within WRAC responded to this survey).

TIER II SUBCOMMITTEE
The Tier II Subcommittee reviewed existing Tier II courses at Michigan State University. In order to obtain as much information from MSU faculty and students as possible on a relatively short timeline, the Tier II Subcommittee identified nine protocols through which to gather information on existing “writing in the disciplines” instruction at MSU. Subcommittee members

• developed, administered, disaggregated and analyzed 445 faculty responses to an on-line instructor survey (including responses from 206 faculty teaching Tier II);
• conducted focus group meetings with approximately one dozen current Tier II faculty;
• collected and analyzed approximately 125 Tier II syllabi;
• conducted focus groups with more than 120 undergraduate students;
• reviewed 60 undergraduate responses to a Tier II student survey (data gathered by WRAC instructor Terri Barry);
• interviewed all 9 Associate Deans for Undergraduate Education in undergraduate degree granting colleges;
• collected data from the Registrar’s Office on Tier II course enrollment;
• studied “writing across the curriculum” and “writing in the disciplines” programs at peer institutions; and
• participated in “Writing Task Force Open Forums” and responded to individual concerns and questions.

For further details about the Tier II Subcommittee methodology, see the Tier II Subcommittee Report at http://www.rhetoric.msu.edu/writing_task_force/WTF_TierII_report.pdf
PART 2 — PRINCIPLES, FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS

THE ROLE OF WRITING IN PUBLIC AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

The overall goal of the Writing Task Force is to make recommendations that will strengthen the undergraduate curriculum overall, particularly by strengthening writing instruction. We want to encourage the University to develop a writing curriculum that is distinctive, integrated, coherent, and relevant to the educational needs of the 21st century — one that will serve the needs of Michigan State University students. We believe that a better coordinated general education writing requirement can enhance and integrate the overall undergraduate educational experience. We believe that writing skills are vital to the academic, disciplinary, and professional success of students. Without strong writing skills, students will not succeed in their professional lives.¹

Further, we believe that writing is important to civic engagement and community practice. We want our students to be fluent in public forms of writing and civic engagement, to be effective in deliberating, arguing, persuading, and consensus building within their communities. We want our students to be critical and ethical users and producers of writing, aware of the ways that information in its various media forms can heal or hurt, educate or mislead, unify or divide. We want our students to have an impact in this new century, and to do so, they must be powerful writers and communicators.

“American education will never realize its potential as an engine of opportunity and economic growth until a writing revolution puts language and communication in their proper place in the classroom. Writing is how students connect the dots in their knowledge. ... Of the three ‘Rs,’ writing is clearly the most neglected.”

- The National Commission on Writing for America’s Families, Schools, and Colleges, Executive Summary of The Neglected “R”: The Need for a Writing Revolution (College Entrance Examination Board, April 2003)

One of the central challenges for universities in the 21st century will be to educate students who can participate effectively in a global economy saturated by new technologies. More than ever before, business, government, industry, and the non-profit sector will need to negotiate richly varied communities and cultures and to communicate with peoples from diverse backgrounds and experiences. More than ever before, they will need writers/communicators who understand and know how to use rapidly changing multimedia technologies. These writers/communicators will, in fact, need to understand the interface between culture and technology.

Our students are already encountering the cultural consequences of global networks and new forms of participatory media, media that are having a profound impact on their work lives, on their social and civic participation, and on their personal experience. Michigan State University students need to be competent, skilled, smart, and effective in producing (and interpreting) this new kind of writing in an array of cultural and public contexts. Literacy educators must prepare teachers capable of teaching writing and other communication competencies within and for these new technologies. We must all become more adept at writing with technology, writing within communities, and writing across cultures. To serve the needs of an increasingly global, technologically-mediated society, Michigan State University must develop an overall writing curriculum that is responsive to that need.

¹ In its 2004 report (Writing: A Ticket to Work ... Or a Ticket Out: A Survey of Business Leaders), the National Commission on Writing for America’s Families, Schools, and Colleges stresses the importance of writing skills in the workplace. Their 2004 survey of 120 major US businesses indicates that writing skills are critical for almost all professional employees in most areas of business and industry and that “opportunity in the United States depends critically on the ability to present one’s thoughts coherently, cogently, and persuasively on paper” (5).
THE ROLE OF WRITING IN THE LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES

As the Writing Task Force conducted its research, it became increasingly clear that a key foundational principle about writing, writing instruction, and the role of writing in the undergraduate curriculum was widely shared at MSU: Writing and communication skills matter in all fields, disciplines, and professional areas, and they also matter in civic life. Writing and communication abilities are a *sine qua non* of the college-educated person — and they should be taught as an integral facet of a liberal arts education. All MSU graduates should be competent writers (and speakers), able to write and speak effectively in a variety of situations and to a variety of audiences (i.e., attentive to diversity and cultural differences that can impact communication); able to write and speak competently within their professional area (with an understanding of the genres, conventions, and communication practices specific to their professional area); and able to write and speak effectively and persuasively as citizens in the public arena.

Writing and communication skills matter in all fields, disciplines, and professional areas, and they also matter in civic life. Writing and communication abilities are a *sine qua non* of the college-educated person — and they should be taught as an integral facet of a liberal arts education.

Over the years this overall principle has been endorsed frequently at MSU by other committees reflecting on the goals of liberal arts education — and on the role of writing and communication skills within that mission. For example,

- In 1988, the Council to Review Undergraduate Education (CRUE) identified writing and communication ability as one of the key outcomes of an undergraduate education: “All MSU graduates should be able to … express themselves clearly, correctly, and effectively in written and oral communication.”

- In its 1991 report, the Joint Committee on Writing Requirements viewed writing not only as important to academic work but also as valuable to civic participation: “writing is a highly personalized and intricate art developed through student-instructor contact. It is an important component of a student’s intellectual endeavor and, consequently, inextricably linked to critical thinking and other language processes such as reading, listening and speaking. Good writing is the product of instruction in writing at various stages in a student’s academic experience and has a value which goes beyond academic life to extend into professional and civic efforts.”

Clearly, a comprehensive discussion of what the liberal arts ought to be at Michigan State University is beyond the scope of this Task Force — but, just as clearly, writing should be at the center of the conversation. If the land grant university were being established today rather than 150 years ago, we believe its founders would develop an educational curriculum to prepare the citizenry for life in a global society and an information era. We believe that their vision of the liberal arts would emphasize a number of traditional outcomes — e.g., careful reading skills, critical thinking ability, scientific reasoning, ethical engagement with others, and awareness of cultural diversity, as well as writing and communication skills. But we also believe that their vision of the liberal arts would be pragmatic and well attuned to current social needs, particularly needs related to global diversity and to technology development. A well-designed and adequately supported writing curriculum can help fill a need for individuals educated to write wisely and well within the workplace and within communities.

Writing ability is certainly critical for college graduates — that value is widely shared. But why is it critical? Clearly it is vitally important as a means of presenting what one knows — most people share that view. But, beyond that, there are two other key reasons for why it is important to teach writing at the college level: (1) Writing is important as a means of acquiring and exploring knowledge, even of creating it. Through the process of reflection, engagement, and inquiry that the act of writing requires, students develop knowledge. The writing process itself requires that the writer engage with
communities, cultures, disciplines, audiences — and this interaction between subject, audience, and writer itself shapes the nature of knowledge and brings knowledge to action. The process of writing itself helps shape, test, refine, and apply ideas in the world. (2) Writing has its own content — e.g., principles of composition and rhetoric, disciplinary and professional standards, genres, and conventions — that students need to know. In the past, many learned these principles and conventions of writing implicitly, through repeated practice in writing and 1-on-1 editorial response from teachers. However, for most students this is not an effective approach. We believe that students will benefit more from direct and explicit treatment of the content of writing. Additionally, we believe that teaching writing explicitly has benefits for faculty as well — e.g., teaching principles explicitly to an entire class can save time compared to trying to address writing issues on a 1-on-1 basis through editorial feedback on papers.

These two reasons further support our view that writing should be regarded not simply in a reductive or instrumental way as a skill involving “packaging thought” or “presenting content,” but as itself a necessary component of a liberal education.
OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on a review of current practices both nationally and at MSU, and drawing on research from literacy and composition studies, the Writing Task Force has developed a number of over-arching recommendations.

OVERALL 1. The University should retain (but improve) the Tier I/Tier II model, which commits to the principle that teaching and promoting writing and communication competencies are the responsibility of the entire faculty, and of all programs, departments, and majors. The Writing Task Force began the inquiry process with the initial belief that this assumption was fundamentally sound — that is, it is appropriate to assign responsibility for teaching general academic and professional writing skills (i.e., Tier I) to a faculty with specialization and expertise in the teaching of writing and to assign responsibility for specialized disciplinary and professional writing (i.e., Tier II) to faculty in individual departments across the University. Nothing in our inquiry has led us to a different conclusion. The vast majority of faculty, deans, associate deans, and chairs that we heard from support maintaining the Tier I / Tier II structure, and we concur. However, there is also widespread agreement that the system needs revision and support.

OVERALL 2. The University should develop new administrative structures and governance mechanisms to coordinate, support, and review the general education writing curriculum. When the Joint Committee on Writing Requirements created the Tier I/Tier II model in 1991, it did not provide a distinct mechanism for overseeing or coordinating the model or for representing and advocating the needs of the writing curriculum across campus (other than “the normal channels of academic governance for program and course approval”). As a result, what began as a well-intended effort has eroded over time from neglect and lack of attention. The Tier I/Tier II model can only work if the University provides a mechanism for supporting it, evaluating it, and improving it over time.

We believe that the University should create two new committees and two new administrative positions, as follows: (a) a University-level writing committee, chaired by a University Director of Writing; and (b) a Tier II Advisory Committee, chaired by an Associate Director of Tier II Writing (for further discussion of this committee’s purpose, see Tier II Recommendation #4).

The University-level writing committee, chaired by the University Director of Writing, would have the following responsibilities:

• coordinating writing instruction and writing curricula across campus;
• promoting the importance of writing in the liberal arts and sciences and in professional areas;
• sponsoring regular evaluation of writing curricula and writing programs on campus;
• promoting the needs of writing outside the campus (e.g., liaison with school systems, with government and business);
• advising on efforts to secure grant money and development funding for writing initiatives; and,
• most importantly, representing the interests of Tier I and Tier II at the University level (particularly, to the Provost’s Office).

The first responsibility of this new committee and its Director would be to lead the effort to implement the changes recommended in the Final Report of the Writing Task Force. We recommend that the committee include in its membership representatives from UCC; representatives from each of the colleges offering undergraduate degree programs and from the professional schools; the Chair of or an administrator from Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures (WRAC); the University Director of Writing; the Director of the Writing Center; and additional faculty in writing, language, literacy, or communication. The University Director of Writing would report in an advisory capacity directly to the Dean of Undergraduate Education. The committee itself would serve in an advisory capacity to UCC.
OVERALL 3. The University should maintain — and, if possible, expand — its commitment to staffing Tier I and Tier II writing courses with full-time and tenure-stream faculty. One of the distinctive features of the overall writing curriculum is the significant involvement of full-time faculty in both Tier I and Tier II instruction. Most universities the size of Michigan State University use part-time instructors (adjuncts or graduate TAs) to staff the vast majority of writing courses. That MSU commits faculty lines to writing is a distinctive feature of our curriculum, one that shows a significant commitment to writing as an important component of a liberal arts education.

OVERALL 4. Tier I and Tier II writing courses should provide students with instruction in writing, not merely be “writing-intensive courses” in which writing is assigned but not explicitly taught. This point reinforces a recommendation from the 1991 Report by the Joint Committee on Writing Requirements, which specified that in Tier II courses, “students should have received instruction and practice in the tasks, forms, and styles of writing appropriate to their discipline or profession.” We believe that all Tier I and Tier II courses should devote a significant amount of time to direct instruction in writing within the course. Departments and programs should have considerable flexibility in determining specifically how writing should be taught for a specific field or discipline. The University should provide development support for faculty efforts to revise curricula and to develop courses to meet this goal.

OVERALL 5. The University should offer more classes in which writing is taught in conjunction with oral and visual communication competencies. Many departments and colleges expressed a strong preference for an integrated approach to written and oral communication; many departments in fact use an integrated approach in their Tier II courses. Students need to develop both rhetorical expertise and flexibility, so that they become proficient at composing their thoughts in multiple ways and for a wide variety of situations: written and oral, single authored and collaborative, visually and verbally. The nature of writing is changing. Since communication media and technologies involve the integration of writing, images, sound, and an array of symbol systems, it is increasingly important for students to be competent writers, competent speakers/presenters, and effective visual communicators. Written, oral, and visual communication competencies, knowledge and awareness of the role of media, and technological skills — all are important to a liberal arts education. Although it was not the charge of the Writing Task Force to address the question of students’ oral communication skills, we want to point out that those skills are just as important as writing skills and deserve a comparable level of attention and emphasis in the curriculum. A comprehensive education in rhetoric would provide integrated instruction in these competencies.

OVERALL 6. The University should promote faculty efforts to integrate technology into writing courses and provide the technological support for them to do so. Writing in the 21st century is, increasingly, online, computer-based writing — and it is important that we teach an expanded notion of writing as including web-based authoring, electronic publishing (in a variety of forms and genres), graphics, audio, video, and the digital media arts in general. Students need developed skills in visual rhetoric and graphic design and an understanding of “digital rhetoric” — that is, how communication happens online (and how online communication differs from print). They need to be capable users and informed critics of communication media — particularly computer technologies used to produce and distribute writing. In this realm, technology is certainly a tool for writing, but it is more than that … it also is the medium, the communication environment in which writing happens.

OVERALL 7. Faculty should be encouraged to assign more writing in their courses. Colleges, departments, programs, and the University as a whole should promote, support, and reward faculty efforts to do so. Students need more opportunities to write throughout their undergraduate education, not only in designated Tier I and Tier II courses. This does not mean that every course needs to be “writing intensive,” or even assign writing. What it does mean is that writing should be regular and frequent through the four years of an MSU student’s education.
Students should have at least some writing opportunities in most of their courses and every semester of their academic work. (IAH courses do provide this opportunity and should be supported in their efforts to do so.) Writing assignments should be a regular feature of, not a rarity in, the undergraduate experience — and over four years students should encounter a wide variety of assignments, ranging from in-class presentations to research papers to case analyses to literature reviews to lab reports to professional correspondence to proposals, etc. This effort, which would require considerable time and commitment by faculty, will only happen if the University as a whole provides incentives, new forms of support, and encouragement for faculty who do so.

OVERALL 8. Writing/communication should prepare students to be effective citizens, skilled communicators in public life, as well as effective professionals. In a liberal arts education, writing should not be focused only on academic, disciplinary, and professional contexts. All students should have multiple opportunities for writing/communicating in the public sphere. Both Tier I and Tier II writing courses should provide students with opportunities for writing in the public sphere.

OVERALL 9. The University should provide more specialized courses and additional support services for students who need additional help with writing and language development. Students have different needs as writers and communicators. They enter the University with different skill sets and levels of competency. The University should recognize the needs of a diverse student body, particularly focusing on the needs of students whose primary language is not English and students from disadvantaged economic and/or academic backgrounds. English as a Second Language (ESL) learners have unique problems in their academic work, even those who have been granted unconditional admission to Michigan State University and those at advanced stages in their degrees. A significant problem stems from difficulties in writing. Currently, non-recurring funds are given to the English Language Center to staff a Writing Lab (40 hours/week) devoted to the needs of ESL students in Tier I writing courses. We recommend that this service be extended to serve those ESL students who need the intensive support of trained linguists, whether in Tier I or Tier II courses.

OVERALL 10. The University should commit to ongoing evaluation of the general education writing curriculum and of the writing programs and other systems supporting that curriculum.
TIER I FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From its process of data gathering and analysis, the Tier I Subcommittee developed a set of guiding principles — core values and commitments to direct specific recommendations. As the Subcommittee continued to collect and assess data and information and to solicit feedback from faculty and students, it revised these principles and built and refined its recommendations.

Guiding Principles

Guiding Principle 1. Build on existing resources and best practices. We are committed to advancing ideas for revision and reform that build on the distinctive strengths and resources of WRAC and the current Tier I program and employ them fully to create a nationally distinguished writing program. New structures for first-year writing should make use of the best features of the current WRA curriculum and the wide pedagogical expertise of the Department’s faculty.

Over its long history as the Department of American Thought and Language, faculty developed and taught courses that used American culture (broadly and inclusively conceived) as the content about which students wrote. Tenure system faculty (most of whom had training in American literature, history, or cultural studies or in American Studies) taught these first-year courses as the major part of their teaching load and developed pedagogies related to student needs.

Now, with the significant addition of faculty trained in rhetoric and composition theory (in order to build the Professional Writing Program and the Rhetoric & Writing graduate programs), new ideas and practices have been introduced and become part of the departmental discourse regarding first-year writing. These faculty members and others already within the department bring perspectives and theories about composition based on rhetoric as an established historical field and as a dynamically changing field with a focus on electronic texts and digital writing with their rhetorical practices.

Core strengths of the current curriculum are and will be shaped by synergies and productive tensions within our multi-disciplinary department, which now offers undergraduate degrees in American Studies and Professional Writing and regularly involves tenure system faculty in first-year writing instruction. Curricular development must take into account practitioner knowledge and current scholarship in both rhetoric/composition and American cultural studies as they have the potential to inform general education writing instruction.

Another distinctive strength of Tier I writing at MSU is involvement of PhDs and tenure-stream faculty in first-year writing instruction. Despite the fact that the percentage of tenure-track faculty in the first-year writing classroom has decreased at MSU, our percentages are better than other U.S. institutions, particularly within the Big Ten and amongst our other peer institutions. MSU is already ahead of its peer institutions in terms of faculty commitment to the first-year and general undergraduate experience of its students.

Guiding Principle 2. Link curricular reform to research on literacy and composing. Curricular reform must be guided by professional statements and standards for writing instruction, as well as by research on composing, literacy, and instructional best practices. Over the past several decades, a vast body of research has accumulated to indicate that “learning to write is a complex process, both individual and social, that takes place over time with continued practice and informed guidance” (WPA). Any movement toward curricular reform must by guided by this research. In line with research-based position and policy statements developed by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA), we hold that by the end of their first year of composition classes, student writing should demonstrate:

Rhetorical knowledge. Student writing should demonstrate understanding and ability to influence audiences with evidenced, controlled, and stylistically appropriate prose. Students
should be able to recognize and communicate for and with particular discourse communities (NCTE; Corbett and Connors).

**Knowledge of conventions.** Students should be aware of the conventional forms and styles of a variety of discourse communities. They should be confident in presenting ideas to various audiences in various contexts. Students should understand that grammar and style are rhetorical choices (WPA).

**Critical thinking.** Students should be able to find, evaluate, and synthesize various sources of information in their writing to evidence their claims. Students should be able to integrate their ideas, articulate their positions, and refute counter arguments in relation to the positions others have taken. Students should also use “writing and reading as a means of inquiry, learning, thinking and communicating” (WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition).

**Efficient and flexible processes.** Students should view writing as a process that demands a set of flexible strategies for generating, revising, and editing prose. Students should recognize that writing well demands constructive criticism from various readers. Finally, students should understand that all writing, no matter how skillful, can benefit from revision (NCTE).

**Incorporation of media and technologies.** Students should be fluent in using multiple media to demonstrate their ideas. They should demonstrate abilities to interpret and produce visual and oral representations of data, ideas, or arguments, and they should understand the rhetorical effectiveness of marshalling various media to convey their ideas. Students should be equipped with skills that allow them to select among and engage production tools (NCTE, “Composing with Non-Print Media”; Kress 2004; Gee 2004; New London Group 1996).

**Cultural contexts.** Students’ literacy development should entail emerging understandings of how cultural and societal practices influence ideas and writing. Students should learn to approach cultural influences such as mainstream media and technology analytically and critically, (see #3 and #5 above), and to see writing as an occasion to perform cultural analysis and critique. They should demonstrate an understanding of not only their own culture(s) but also the culture(s) of others, including linguistic, ethnic, environmental, civic, national, or transnational in nature and scope.

**Guiding Principle 3. Writing pedagogy should be enhanced through expansion of technological resources. Faculty must be supported in learning to engage these resources.** We believe that computer-based writing instruction can promote teacher-student interactions that enhance the effectiveness of writing instruction. We must commit to the development of technological environments and resources that not only allow teachers to engage students’ writing practices immediately and frequently, but also that enable the writing program to realize a full range of pedagogical and course delivery possibilities created by well-equipped technological learning environments. Any commitment to expanded technological resources must be accompanied by an equally strong commitment to providing professional development opportunities for faculty seeking ways to enrich their pedagogies through computer-mediated instruction. Computer technologies have changed the processes, products, and contexts for writing in dramatic ways — and writing instruction needs to change to suit how writing is produced in digital spaces. To enable such instruction, the University must commit to continued investment in the necessary technological resources and learning environments, and to supporting WRAC in offering opportunities to faculty to learn how to use these resources to enrich their pedagogies.

**Guiding Principle 4. Create a distinctive integration of writing, culture and technology within Tier I writing.** An exemplary writing program must be responsive to changes in the social and technological environments for reading and writing in the 21st century. MSU’s Mission Statement has extended its land-grant mission to reflect “the world’s greater interdependence, changes in both state and national economy, and the explosive growth of knowledge,
technology and communications.” This principle attends to the changing communications ecology in which our students learn, live, and work. A first-class writing program must be aligned with historical imperatives and must be attentive and responsive to changes in the forms and environments of reading and writing. The global proliferation of digital technologies and the subsequent changes in the dissemination of information and knowledge have profound consequences for literacy and for writing instruction. Cross-disciplinary research points to the emergence of multiple forms of literacy along the print-to-digital continuum (Brandt, 1999; Cope and Kalantzis, 2000; Diebert, 1997; Hawisher and Selfe, 2004; Kress, 2003). As we move into the 21st century, we are in the midst of “a messy transition from a modern world of superpower nations and manufacturing might to a postmodern world of global commerce and the rhizomatically organized exchange of digital information” (Hawisher and Selfe, “Becoming Literate in an Information Age” 664).

Our students must develop competencies in information, media, and digital literacy, as well as an understanding of their own and others’ cultural vantage points in a global context. With this in mind, we anchor our writing program with “a new vision of rhetoric — one that takes its cues from the past when rhetoric/writing were seen as a core field of study in the liberal arts, but which reconceptualizes rhetoric as concerned with writing in technological environments, within communities, and across cultures” (“Strategic Vision”).

The current Tier I curriculum is built on traditional liberal arts education in the humanities. This curriculum situates writing instruction in the study of cultural forms, processes, and practices. We now have a complement of faculty with expertise in digital culture, multimedia rhetoric, and writing pedagogy. We are well positioned at MSU to develop this connection into a writing program that is distinctive in its commitment to integration of writing, rhetoric, culture, and technology.

**Guiding Principle 5. Curricular reform should be guided by MSU’s tradition of respect for students as active learners and decision makers.** Students come to MSU with a variety of writing skills and abilities. While the current curriculum is strong in its capacity to match course content to student need, we are in a place to offer even more curricular choices for students, particularly in the areas of ESL, writing intensive pedagogies, and thematically based courses. We strive to build a writing program that is distinctive in its respect for student autonomy and ability.

MSU has long held to the belief that entering students are not empty vessels into which knowledge is poured. They come with experiences, opinions and skill sets that, properly identified and marshaled, can be effective allies in their University education. Nowhere is this philosophy more evident than in the first-year writing program, where students are given opportunities to engage with the curriculum in ways that are both personal and challenging. Indeed it is one of the distinctive marks of the WRAC program that students are presented with multiple ways to satisfy their Tier I writing requirement.

**Guiding Principle 6. Address working conditions that undermine the quality of writing instruction.** We believe that to sustain and strengthen the first-year composition program, it is imperative to address the long-term staffing of Tier I writing and to consider how adjustments to the staffing model will promote instructional and learning quality as well as continuity.

**Guiding Principle 7. Respond to changing and diverse populations.** In its continuing efforts to be responsive to diverse populations and unprecedented global migration, the writing program faces two interrelated imperatives: (a) to offer the best possible literacy instruction to students from a range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds; and (b) to fully incorporate historically excluded discourses of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and disability in a way that enables diverse voices to find legitimate courses of public action.

A true commitment to diversity must be supported not only by a more general awareness of cultural issues, but also by an informed plan to teach in a way that is responsive to linguistically diverse learners — a steadily growing constituency of the larger population. Literacy pedagogies are only
effective insofar as they can orient academic skills to “culturally and linguistically diverse mainstream students” (Cummins, 2001).

Michigan State University’s Mission Statement emphasizes making opportunities available for “students of varying interests, abilities, backgrounds, and expectations.” One of the University’s Guiding Principles describes diversity as a current strength and a continuing goal: “MSU strives to be a community where people of different cultures, intellectual positions, and lifestyles can reach their full potential. … MSU encourages people to become fully engaged in the challenging issues of diversity within community.” To fulfill its mission, MSU seeks to increase its retention and recruitment of diverse students, increase its attention to issues of national and international diversity, promote unit-level awareness of diversity, and improve the educational climate for diverse students.

Recommendations

**TIER I 1: Ensure curricular consistency through assessment and accountability.** Faculty and students alike have reported that they greatly appreciate having a rich selection of Tier I writing courses. Faculty members report that one of the greatest strengths they see in the curricula rests in the “variety and range of course topics … and latitude for instructors to shape and direct courses in ways that play to their strengths and interests” (anonymous survey response). From the student perspective, as reported both in forums and in research in Rhetoric and Composition, students learn more about writing when they can write about topics about which they care, of which they have some knowledge, and in which they have personal experience. While offering a variety of topics is useful for students and faculty alike, both faculty and students indicated that more consistency and accountability for outcomes within and across current first-year WRAC course offerings are needed.

**TIER I 2: Expand the Tier I writing requirement.** We propose that additional units of writing be added to the first-year writing requirement to deepen and broaden student-professor contact, to afford students intensive and extensive experience with writing, and to ensure that all students get the necessary range of writing experience and instruction needed to be successful in their majors, disciplines, and academic fields. (Note: The Associated Students of MSU endorse the return to a two-semester first-year writing requirement — see Appendix B.)

Currently, the writing requirement consists of one four-credit course. We propose to extend writing through the first year by expanding to two well-differentiated and carefully sequenced three credit courses:

WRA 101 Introduction to Composition and Rhetoric (3 cr)
WRA 102 Writing: Topics and Issues in American Culture (3 cr)

Two semesters of writing within the first year send the clear message that writing is a continuous part of both general and professional education at Michigan State University, not simply a one-course requirement. Further, it allows for better articulation of first year writing experiences. In the first course, students learn to situate themselves as writers, composers, and editors in a wide variety of environments. The course functions as a rhetorical context for writing in which students get direct instruction and practice in composing for various forms of presentation, in print and digital environments, and in which students own texts in progress form a significant part of the subject matter of the course. In the second, writing-intensive course, the students focus more specifically on the conventions of academic writing in the interdisciplinary environment American Studies offers. Since writing improvement is tied to repeated practice, this allows more time for students to solidify gains they make through different genres and types of assignments. The additional two credits — i.e., the move from the current 4 credit requirement to 6 credits — allow more time for specific instruction and practice in composing in digital environments, which adds to but does not replace forms of composing students are already doing. In the current four credit structure, there is simply not enough class or practice time for students to accomplish and get sufficient practice in all the important goals of a
distinguished and effective first year program.
WRA 101 Introduction to Composition and Rhetoric (3 cr)
WRA 101 is a first-semester course that foregrounds purposes, processes, principles, and strategies of rhetoric and composing. It is designed to help students understand and meet the expectations of writing in the University as well as to prepare students for further inquiries into the importance of written communication in public life. To the extent that WRA 101 is intended to help students see themselves as enfranchised knowledge consumers and producers, it serves an important function as part of the first-year experience.

WRA 101 prepares students to work within the more focused and specialized rhetorical situations of WRA 102 by teaching them to see, experience, apply, and assess writing as a way of making knowledge in the world. Because WRA 101 aims to teach students how to learn from writing — that is, how to evaluate and work within new rhetorical situations as well as how to use writing to make new knowledge — course design should allow students ample time and opportunity for deep inquiry into rhetorical processes and practice working within a range of rhetorical situations.

Upon completion of WRA 101, students should

- demonstrate an understanding of writing as an epistemic process;
- understand the potential of, and be able to use, writing for purposes of reflection and action;
- demonstrate an active, working knowledge of rhetorical forms and functions;
- engage in writing as a social activity;
- demonstrate knowledge of how writing functions as expressive and persuasive discourse in various cultures and publics;
- apply and understand the uses of invention strategies and heuristics;
- exercise a flexible repertoire of writing behaviors, strategies, and approaches;
- know the function of voice and style in creating texts, and be able to choose from a repertoire of options;
- know how to assess their own native strategies of knowledge-making in composing, use these resourcefully to build new knowledge, and assess the terms of new knowledge;
- work within a repertoire of genres and modes to realize appropriate rhetorical aims and purposes;
- understand that various academic disciplines and fields have different expectations for writing in terms of genre, voice, syntactical choices, use of evidence, and citation styles;
- be prepared to use writing to learn more specialized and disciplinary knowledge;
- understand the meaning and role of research in the production of texts (locate and critically evaluate writing resources on library databases, in periodical indexes, in library stacks, and on the World Wide Web);
- understand diction, usage, and style as conventional and rhetorical features of writing; and
- demonstrate fluency in standard edited English.

(Note: These outcomes will need further articulation as “demonstrable proficiencies” to function as performance standards for the purposes of assessment. Such articulation would take place within departmental committees as programs of assessment are developed within WRAC.)

WRA 102 Writing: (Topics and Issues in American Culture) (3 cr)
The following topics represent the current available options for Tier I writing courses. These topics would continue to be taught as WRA 102, and new thematic topics could be developed.

a. Science and Technology
b. Law and Justice in the United States
c. The American Racial and Ethnic Experience
d. American Radical Thought
e. Public Life in America
f. Women in America
g. Men in America
h. The Evolution of American Thought
i. Major Topics in American Thought
WRA 102 is a writing-intensive course designed to engage first-year students in writing as a means of inquiry by taking up a subject, topic, or question in American Culture Studies. It further develops skills and competencies acquired in WRA 101. WRA 102 helps students to develop consciousness of differing methods of inquiry and assumptions about language, evidence, audience, and form.

Whereas students’ products and processes of literacy learning in relation to rhetorical knowledge comprise the primary focus of WRA 101, WRA 102 expands and extends students’ literacy learning into conventional patterns of inquiry and bodies of knowledge. Students in 102 work to direct their rhetorical knowledge to focused projects of inquiry on issues relevant to informed participation in American public and political life.

Upon completion of WRA 102, students should

- apply knowledge of rhetorical processes and strategies to new domains of inquiry;
- use research writing for inquiry into issues and controversies in American cultural and civic life;
- identify similarities and differences and how questions, issues, and controversies are defined in academics and in popular media;
- assess issues and define problems for research purposes;
- apply knowledge of the meanings and uses of research in academic inquiry;
- demonstrate ability to investigate and analyze the various textual and research conventions of particular academic disciplines or fields;
- locate and evaluate primary and secondary (text, electronic, and multimedia) sources;
- show proficiency in using a variety of sources for a range of purposes;
- demonstrate a repertoire of genres and modes for composing and ability to assess which genres and modes are appropriate for which contexts and purposes;
- show understanding of the logics and uses of citation systems and documentation styles; and
- show competence with one citation system/documentation style.

Special “linked” versions of WRA 101 and 102 for selected students

We remain committed to offering all students opportunities to develop their communication skills in settings that are appropriate to their individual learning needs and that work through sound, responsive pedagogical practices. To this end, we propose that students in need of additional, concentrated support during the first year enroll in sections of WRA 101 and 102 specifically dedicated to meeting those needs. (Note: This 101-102 “stretch sequence” would replace the current developmental writing courses — WRA 0102, WRA 1004.)

These linked sections would comprise a year-long learning community during both the fall and spring semesters; in each case the same instructor would teach both classes over the course of both semesters. We hope to keep class sizes slightly smaller in these sections of WRA (21 students or fewer), and to provide both the instructor and students additional support throughout the course. We are currently working with faculty from Teacher Education and Critical Studies to develop a program that would enable Secondary English Education students opportunities to serve as Undergraduate Teaching Assistants (UTAs) in the WRA 101-102 courses as part of their field placement experiences.

Placement into the first-year writing sequence

The success of the first-year writing sequence depends in part on instituting a sensitive, flexible, and pedagogically sound system of placement into these classes. To contain the investment the University must make in an expanded first-year program, a mechanism must be in place through which students may be enrolled in the writing courses or courses that best suit their needs as learners. Not all students will need to begin with WRA 101, for example — more advanced students will be able to have their needs as developing writers addressed by placement directly into WRA 102, which offers multiple opportunities for writing but comparatively less direct instruction in individualized writing strategies and processes.
DIRECTED SELF-PLACEMENT
We recommend that the University explore options for placement into first-year writing classes. In particular, we recommend that MSU consider the option of Directed Self-Placement, and begin by implementing a pilot version of this model that may be implemented and assessed on a small scale.

We believe that the recommendation to establish a two-semester writing sequence and to abolish the current Preparation for College Writing course in favor of a special linked 101-102 sequence can be partially enabled by a placement model that differentiates the curriculum in ways that address students’ needs as learner without also doubling costs and resource needs. MSU students are already encouraged to make inquiry-based decisions as they move to fulfill their first-year writing requirement. The next logical step is to help them become critical evaluators of themselves as writers and bring them fully into the decision making process. One possibility is Directed Self-Placement.

Resources needed for an expanded first-year writing curriculum
To realize recommendations regarding outcomes assessment, student placement, and professional development and training, we identify the following resource needs:

- Areas of faculty expertise for future tenure-track hires
  - writing program administration (assessment and placement)
  - literacy and technology
  - composition theory and pedagogy

- Staffing
  - fixed-term faculty positions that enfranchise committed, engaged teachers of writing. We suggest a phase-in model that eventually allows the majority of Tier I and Tier II classes to be taught by enfranchised, continuing employees contributing to the department’s vertical curricula
  - a writing and placement administrative assistant who works with WPA specialist member above

- Support
  - released time for faculty and staff who coordinate training and develop professional development initiatives
  - pool of recurring funds to support travel to conferences for WRAC faculty and staff to conferences for continued professional development
  - GTA student summer funding to develop summer hybrid sections
  - monies to support summer and yearly training of faculty in technology workshops for WRA 101 and 102 professors and instructors
  - summer scholarships for incoming students who attend bridge programs that we would like to create and integrate with Quantitative Literacy.

TIER I 3. Articulate course descriptions and outcomes within departmental curriculum committees. In Recommendation #2 above, we describe a number of proficiencies that students who have successfully completed first-year writing should be able to demonstrate. These proficiencies must be assessed, and that assessment must be coordinated to ensure that the curriculum is reaching its objectives.

We thus recommend the establishment in AY 2005-2006 of (a) two standing departmental committees for WRA 101 and 102 charged with developing general course descriptions, proficiencies, and outcomes; and (b) an elected Curriculum and Assessment committee charged with articulation of the 101-102 sequence as well as with the development of assessment instruments and procedures for 101 and 102.

TIER I 4. Improve work conditions for fixed-term faculty teaching Tier I.
To address the problems with current labor conditions and to anticipate the instructional needs of a revised composition program seeking national recognition for excellence and innovation, we propose the following changes to non-tenure-stream assistant professorships:
• Faculty hired to teach first-year writing full-time should be placed on continuing appointments with no limit on the number of years of full-time status. Review and evaluation should take place during the second and fourth years as part of the condition of continuing appointment status, with a job security status review and decision in the sixth year.

• Course load should be 3–3, with rotating and regular opportunities to teach IAH, Professional Writing courses, and American Studies courses as needed and arranged.

• Starting salary should be in the $34,000 to $35,000 range, with annual salary increments equal to the Level 1 merit pay raise as determined by the departmental chair.

• There should be opportunities for special one-time merit bonuses for the publication of a book or a certain number of research publications over a specified period of time.

• Department bylaws should provide voting rights and provisions for representation on all key committees.

• Training and curricular development should be offered to and maintained for these teachers of writing with a course-release offered to those who coordinate such efforts.

TIER I 5. Develop and support the use of wireless writing classrooms.

Wireless technology and laptop computers allow students and instructors maximum flexibility for integrating composing technologies into daily classroom practices. Such classrooms allow writing to be integrated into both whole-group and small-group activities, online composing processes, research, and collaboration. Allowing flexibility in movement and work, wireless classrooms should have flexible furniture — lightweight, easily foldable tables and chairs that can be rearranged to support whole-class discussions and small-group activities. Support for this recommendation would include:

• Wireless-access laptop carts for writing instruction. Carts will support wireless instruction as students move from wired, desktop machines to wireless laptops; carts will provide machines for students financially or otherwise unable to purchase a laptop.

• Spaces for writing that support presentations and collaborative work, such as large-screen displays (e.g., wall displays, smart panels), digital whiteboard software, flat-screen displays that support collaborative work, digital drawing tables, video cameras, and microphones.

TIER I 6. Create expanded and integrative professional development opportunities within WRAC. In our survey of WRAC faculty, teachers of the current Tier I curricula reported little opportunity to work with their colleagues. Those who teach the service-learning section (WRA 135) have modeled for the department the integrative learning experience possible when teachers collaborate to share resources, develop assignments, and create forums for problem solving. Creating opportunities for teachers to work together addresses, in part, the problem of isolation within the Department that part-time and contingent faculty members encounter. We propose that rich models of training be established and sustained within WRAC for Tier I faculty and that an initial professional development committee be established in WRAC to support this undertaking.

We recommend that regular professional development opportunities be made available not only to Graduate Teaching Assistants (for whom they should be expanded to better prepare TAs to work successfully within the two-semester sequence), but also to all fixed-term and tenure-stream faculty.

Integrative training must include the development of facilities that foster and allow faculty to integrate computer-mediated and technology-rich approaches. We currently lag behind our peer institutions in providing students with technology-rich learning opportunities.
TIER II FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With input from faculty and academic specialists, students, and Associate Deans for Undergraduate Education, and with careful consideration of this University’s unique strengths as well as consideration of research-based models for effective writing across the curriculum programs at peer institutions, the Tier II Subcommittee submits the following recommendations to address issues that have emerged through our research on the current Tier II model and curricula on this campus. We identify the most pressing needs as the following:

- Students need additional opportunities to “write to learn” as well as to “learn to write”\(^2\) and to revise their writing (and their thinking) after meaningful feedback throughout their academic careers.

- Departments need coherent, systematic, outcomes-based and assessment-driven plans for the further development of their students’ general and discipline- and field-specific writing skills. Revisions to these plans need to be informed by direct assessment of student writing.

- Faculty need recognition and support for developing, implementing, assessing, and refining the integration of writing into curricula that serve as the backbone of each department’s plans for improving student writing.

- The University needs methods of fostering interdisciplinary conversations on writing in and across disciplines, conversations that recognize and celebrate current successes as well as provide opportunities for faculty to learn new theories and methodologies for integrating writing into the curriculum in ways that enhance mastery of course content.

The Tier II Writing Task Force Subcommittee recommends that departments, programs, colleges, and the University at large adopt, implement, regularly assess, and continually revise a model for writing in the disciplines that builds on the ideas expressed in the 1991 Joint Commission on Writing Report. In order to implement this process, the Tier II Subcommittee makes the following additional recommendations.

TIER II 1. Create a University-wide faculty committee — the Tier II Advisory Committee (TAC) — responsible for working with the Writing Center to foster continuous improvement of students’ communication. TAC would be composed of a representative from each of the colleges that awards undergraduate degrees. The Director of the Writing Center and an Associate Director for Tier II Writing (see Recommendation #4 below) would serve as ex officio members of this committee. TAC would be charged with two primary responsibilities: (a) designing and implementing a faculty professional development program aimed at improving writing instruction across the University; and (b) supporting the efforts of departments and programs to develop their Tier II plans (see Tier II Recommendation #2). To facilitate this charge, TAC would sponsor a funding program through which departments and programs could apply for support to study student writing, to revise and/or assess their plans for improving student writing skills, to revise Tier II curricula, and/or to provide discipline-specific professional development opportunities. Applicants for TAC support would be asked to explain how these funds would help achieve improvement in student writing competencies. We recommend that recurring funding be allocated to provide resources for TAC and that the effectiveness of this initiative be evaluated at regular intervals.

---

\(^2\) Some understand “writing to learn” and “learning to write” as one and the same. We distinguish them here to draw the reader’s attention to opportunities to use writing, even in very large classes, to create active learning opportunities for students who are asked to make their thinking visible so that it is more readily available for critique and revision. Such opportunities are often informal and not graded. The primary focus in writing to learn opportunities is not the teaching of writing, but the use of writing to attain other course outcomes.
**TIER II 2. Develop systematic outcomes-based and assessment-driven plans for the further development of student writers.** With the assistance of an Associate Director for Tier II Writing (see Recommendation #4 below), each department would develop a coherent and systematic outcomes-based and assessment-driven plan for developing student writing skills. Each department would begin by identifying the writing skills needed for success in a particular department, field or profession, and, more broadly, for full community and civic engagement — the communication skills one would expect of a graduate with a strong liberal arts and sciences education. (“Communication skills” could well include oral and visual communication, as well as writing skills, as appropriate to particular disciplines and professional areas.)

We recommend that departments submit these plans first to the appropriate department chair, associate chair or curriculum committee, and then to the appropriate Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education, who will share the college’s plans for improving writing with the Dean for Undergraduate Education. We recommend that these plans, updated annually, do the following:

- identify the particular attributes\(^3\) that faculty and others with a vested interest in a department’s students wish to see in student writing;
- provide results from an assessment of the current skill levels of a representative sample of students for evidence of the desired characteristics;
- propose revisions to existing curricula to create opportunities for students to develop those writing skills that need improvement; and
- include a timeline identifying when students will be reassessed to determine the ability of the revised curriculum to realize the desired writing skills.

We recommend that a staggered schedule be developed according to which these plans would be initially reviewed by TAC, which would then make recommendations to the University Curriculum Committee. We recommend that each departmental plan be reviewed once every five years (i.e., 20% of each college’s departmental plans would be reviewed annually).

Most departments will distribute responsibility for the development of these student writing competencies across many courses. However, as the 1991 Joint Commission on Writing Report first described, each department’s plans must, at a minimum, include one course identified as the writing in the discipline (“W”) course or a cluster of courses that, taken together, fulfill similar expectations. We recommend that all cluster courses be identified as “WC” courses for ease of identification by faculty, students, the Registrar’s Office, and TAC. In their Tier II W or WC syllabi, faculty need to provide evidence that these courses accomplish the following:

- are characterized by continuous attention being given to writing;
- reinforce and extend writing skills acquired in Tier I writing courses;
- provide regular opportunities for student learning by inviting revision after meaningful feedback on several writing assignments;
- give students experience in writing tasks, forms, and styles appropriate to particular disciplines and professional fields;
- encourage critical analysis and synthesis of major concepts in the students’ majors;
- provide students with opportunities to master increasingly sophisticated writing tasks; and
- further develop students’ proficiencies with communication technologies and, when appropriate, with the particular forms of writing that newer technologies support (digital slide presentations, multimedia compositions, website development, etc.).

---

\(^3\) We view the identification of desired attributes of student writing in student writing samples as a complex act that involves, for instance, reaching faculty consensus on evidence of “critical thinking” and assessment of “sufficient” and “compelling” evidence as well as adherence to principles of grammar and citation and elements of particular forms of writing. One responsibility of the Tier II Associate Director will be to guide interested faculty through protocols for making these decisions.
TIER II 3. Provide adequate support for Tier II writing courses and faculty at departmental and college levels. To support the Tier II writing in the disciplines initiative, we recommend that the University, colleges, and departments provide additional support for faculty efforts to teach writing, including:

- providing TA support for Tier II writing courses that exceed the enrollment limit of Tier I courses;
- taking into account Tier II instruction in tenure and promotion decisions and merit raises;
- providing support and release time for faculty who coordinate instructor and student involvement in the development, implementation, and assessment of the department’s writing plan; and
- providing faculty professional development opportunities that relate to the meaningful integration of writing into courses across the curriculum.

“There needs to be a lot of conversation between faculty who are trained in writing studies and faculty in the disciplines — far more than has ever existed at MSU — in order for writing to become the responsibility of all faculty.”

“Without professional development in teaching writing, it is unreasonable to expect that faculty with no experience or knowledge base would be effective in teaching writing, even in their own discipline.”

- selected faculty comments from Tier II survey

TIER II 4. Charge the Writing Center to offer additional support for Tier II faculty, to help departments revise Tier II plans, and to provide additional tutoring services for students in Tier II courses. We recommend that the Writing Center be provided with the resources necessary to expand its services to support Tier II efforts.

- In response to the Joint Commission’s call for “a sufficient number of faculty writing experts to help Tier II faculty establish and meet goals for their programs,” we recommend that the University create a new position in the Writing Center — the Associate Director for Tier II Writing. This individual, an expert in writing assessment and writing across the curriculum, will provide direct support for the development of departmental plans for improving student writing and for faculty teaching Tier II writing courses.

- We recommend that the Writing Center, in consultation with TAC, expand its efforts to provide professional development opportunities for all faculty interested in improving the writing of their students. These efforts will include reviving the Faculty Writing Project (FWP), an adaptation of the National Writing Project’s professional development model. Facilitators of the FWP summer institute will invite faculty (a) to share productive approaches to integrating writing into their courses; (b) to study and collaboratively develop theories, research, methods, and materials related to improving student writing; and (c) to work on their own writing (e.g., to develop and revise publications in their fields of interest).

- We recommend that in addition to preparing cohorts of undergraduate and graduate students to provide support for Tier II student writers (as well as other writers) at the pre-writing, drafting, and editing stages of their writing processes, the Writing Center expand its efforts to provide support for students who are struggling with issues related to grammar, syntax, punctuation, and manuscript and citation conventions.

- We recommend that the Director of the Writing Center and the Associate Director for Tier II writing become ex officio members of TAC (as described in Recommendation #1 above).
• In general, the Writing Center would be responsible for creating opportunities for faculty across campus to participate in conversations on the teaching of writing within disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and professional contexts, through workshops, roundtables, and presentations.

• Finally, we recommend the Writing Center be evaluated using a protocol similar to those used for the evaluation of other MSU Centers.
APPENDIX A — MEMBERS OF THE WRITING TASK FORCE

The Writing Task Force consists of 35 members: 28 faculty (from 10 different colleges), 1 academic specialist, 3 graduate students, and 3 undergraduate students.

COORDINATING COMMITTEE
James Porter, WRAC/R&W, Chair
Sue Gass, L&L
Steve Lacy, JRN
Julie Lindquist, WRAC (Chair, Tier I Subcommittee)
Mike Orth, ANR (Co-Chair, Tier II Subcommittee)
Patricia Stock, WRAC/ENG
Janet Swenson, Writing Center (Co-Chair, Tier II Subcommittee)

TIER I SUBCOMMITTEE
Julie Lindquist, WRAC, Chair
Ellen Cushman, WRAC
Dânielle DeVoss, WRAC
Ann E. Larabee, WRAC
Doug Noverr, WRAC
Leonora Smith, WRAC
Teresa T. Barry, WRAC
Fred Barton, UUD
Mary A. Sherby, WRAC
Leah Kirell, Graduate Student, TE
Vinayak Prasad, Undergraduate

TIER II SUBCOMMITTEE
Janet Swenson, WC, Co-Chair
Mike Orth, ANR, Co-Chair
Walter Benenson, PHY
Patricia Edwards, ED
Kitty Geissler, WRAC/IAH
Craig Gunn, ME
Sonya Gunnings-Moton, CEPSE
Susan A. Krouse, ANTH
Mike Mazzeo, Business
Ernest Morrell, TE
Charlene Polio, L&L
Malea Powell, WRAC
Robert Shelton, Lyman Briggs
Teresa Tavormina, ENG
Colleen Tremonte, James Madison
Diana Twede, Packaging
Scott Schopieray, Graduate Student, LTC
Gail Pallister, Undergraduate
Sarann, Phany, Undergraduate

RESEARCH ASSISTANT
Les Burns, Graduate Student, TE
APPENDIX B — ASMSU SUPPORT FOR TWO-SEMESTER REQUIREMENT

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC ASSEMBLY
TWELFTH SESSION

BILL NO. 13:
INTRODUCED BY: PRASAD SECONDED BY: HANCOCK

A BILL TO: Support the Two Semester Model of the Tier I Writing Task Force.

THE ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY ENACT:

WHEREAS, The Academic Assembly of ASMSU appreciates the incredible importance of strong writing skills and disciplined writing habits for academic and professional life,

WHEREAS, The Academic Assembly shares the sentiments expressed below by the Writing Task Force in its draft report:

Writing and communication skills matter in all fields, disciplines, and professional areas, and they also matter in civic life. Writing and communication abilities are a sine qua non of the college-educated person — and they should be taught as an integral facet of a liberal arts education. All MSU graduates should be competent writers (and speakers), able to write and speak effectively in a variety of situations and to a variety of audiences (i.e., attentive to diversity and cultural differences that can impact communication), able to write and speak competently within their professional area (with an understanding of the genres, conventions, and communication practices specific to their professional area); and able to write and speak effectively and persuasively as citizens in the public arena. (Writing Task Force | Draft Report — 7)

WHEREAS, The Academic Assembly of ASMSU has a responsibility to ensure that Michigan State University fosters and engenders the writing skills of all its students,

WHEREAS, The Writing Task Force presents two models for changes to the Tier I writing program at MSU and one model is significantly superior to the other in terms of addressing the issues listed above; therefore, be it,

RESOLVED, that the Academic Assembly of the Associated Students of Michigan State University strongly support the Writing Task Force Tier I subcommittee’s Plan A: Two-semester Rhetorical/Developmental Model for the following reasons:

• Plan A alone allows for the swift transition to a two semester writing requirement
• Two semesters of writing instruction has been repeatedly demonstrated to lead to superior writing skills for students
• A two semester program alone represents the vision outlined by the Provosts Office
• Students desire two semesters of writing instruction in their undergraduate education

RESOLVED, That the Chairperson of the Academic Assembly of ASMSU draft a letter (to be sent by November 4, 2004) to the Provost and President Designate, the Chairperson and Members of the Writing Task Force, and the Chairperson and Members of Academic Council voicing ASMSU support of the two semester model.

RESOLVED, That the Chairperson of the Academic Assembly of ASMSU and the External Vice Chairperson lobby for the adoption of a two semester Tier I writing program indefinitely

INTRODUCED ON 10/26/04

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON

SPECIAL ACTION TAKEN DATE

FINAL ACTION TAKEN X Consent

11/1/04

PASSED FAILED VOTE DATE

_________________________ __________________________
Daniel Weber Molly Deming
CHAIRPERSON SECRETARY