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Educational Support and Administrative Review

Center for Writing Excellence

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Director

1. Overview of Department

1.1 Brief overview of department/area

Officially instituted under a director in 2007, the UNA Center for Writing Excellence (CWE) is the university's primary resource for writing support, not only for students, but for faculty and staff as well. Located in the basement of Collier Library, the Center is open for 66 hours per week in the Fall and Spring, providing 108 hours of face-to-face and online consultation services. In the Summer, it is open 40 hours per week, providing 48 hours of face-to-face and online consultation service. The Center is also open limited hours during the May Intersession, at the request of specific faculty in research intensive courses. Staffing for the Center includes a full-time, faculty position Director with a terminal degree in Rhetoric/Composition, a 1/3 time Administrative Assistant, and approximately 12-16 undergraduate and graduate writing consultants each semester. In the 2011-2012 fiscal year, the center operated on a budget of approximately \$30,500.00, excluding director salary and summer pay.

1.2 Mission statement for the department/area

The Center's mission is three-fold: to provide all UNA students with instruction and writing resources; to provide UNA faculty with teaching resource support and professional development opportunities in Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID); and to facilitate and develop community-oriented programs in writing, reading, and writing-as-critical thinking.

1.3 Goals and objectives of the department/area

CWE short term goals and objectives involve the semester operations of the office, such as the number of consultations and workshops provided and the demographics served by those activities. Annual Action Plan short term goals from 2007-2012 focused primarily on providing consultation services for at risk demographics: Students enrolled in EN 099: Basic Writing, ESL students, and minority students participating in Project Open (minority Nursing students) and later the Presidential Mentors Academy (minority students on a designated scholarship). Goals pertaining to these demographics were created because they would afford the best chance to support retention. However, these goals do not serve as ideal goals for the overall short-term operation of the Center, since they only focused on a small demographic of the overall student population, and completely ignore the unpredictability of use tied to a brand new office.

In the writing center field, successful writing centers typically operate at about 15% capacity and include a significant number of repeat clients (3 or more visits per semester). Therefore, reasonable short term goals and objectives for the first five years of the Center for Writing Excellence need to emerge from this benchmark and expectation, as well as from the new nature of the office.

Table 1. 2007-2012 CWE Short-Term Goals and Objectives

Goal	Objectives
1. Identify Operational Benchmarks for overall CWE use.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Track consultations over a 5 year period to identify trends in use. 2. Track workshop offerings over a five year period to identify trends in use.
3. Achieve and sustain semester length operational success.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sustain at least 15% capacity each semester. 2. Identify and improve upon a benchmark for repeat clients.
4. Support retention initiatives.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify and improve upon benchmark consultations for at-risk populations (EN 099, ESL, Project OPEN, PMA students).

The core of long-term goals and objectives for the Center for Writing Excellence is to create a specific office identity. The evolution of this identity is reflected in the change of titles and names, from tutors in the University Writing Center to consultants in the Center for Writing Excellence. The goals and objectives required for this transformation emerge in part from the short-term goal of identifying operational benchmarks, but they also emphasize the quality of support, resource, and training in the Center, as well as the essential act of establishing and nurturing mutually beneficial institutional relationships.

Table 2. 2007-2012 CWE Long-Term Goals and Objectives

Goal	Objectives
1. Sustain or improve CWE use.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Track consultations for goal assessment. 2. Track workshops for goal assessment. 3. Meet with faculty and staff to establish relationships and opportunities for consultations and workshops. 4. Advertise CWE services.
2. Improve consultant quality.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide a detailed training course for consultants. 2. Conduct regular staff meetings. 3. Increase consultant pay.

1.4 Governance structure of the department/area

Employees of the Center for Writing Excellence report to the director, as does the administrative assistant. The director reports to the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs. Consultants are regularly solicited for input and creation of office policies and procedures, which can be created individually or collaboratively; as a response to issues and challenges in the center or proactively; and in staff meetings or training class or during day-to-day operations. All new policies are distributed and vetted electronically via e-mail, and are included in an employee handbook, created and revised regularly by the staff and the director. This open-ended approach to office management allows student employees to maintain an active involvement and investment in the office, keeping with the director's philosophy that employees who have a voice and an active stake in the workplace will be happier and more productive.

1.5 Brief description of the national status of the department/area (including emerging issues and trends.)

National arguments around writing centers traditionally have involved issues of identity, staffing, and budget. Writing Centers are traditionally perceived as remedial, subservient to English Departments, and therefore marginalized. Because each center exists in a local context, the field has difficulty reconciling a national argument for management, location, purpose, etc. Those who resist the notion of a writing center as marginalized seek out institutional relationships, placement, and funding that coincide with the ideas of writing support as non-remedial and writing as a method of learning, and therefore critical to the university mission.

Staffing issues are often complicated by local writing center identity. Directors can range in education from BA to PhD level, and may be staff or faculty, tenured, non-tenured, or even temporary. Similarly, arguments are made for staffing centers with professional, graduate, and undergraduate tutors. A mix is usually employed, based on funding, student demographics, and local hire qualifications and availability. In the field, colleges and universities who employ the highest qualified directors and staff members in the most secure positions are naturally perceived as having a greater concern for writing in the institution.

Like staffing, budget issues and scenarios are also the product of local identity, with a similar impact on institutional perception. Low budgets equal low priority, which puts constant pressure on writing center administrators to develop and implement quantifiable assessment strategies to a non-quantifiable activity in order to preserve existing funds. In addition, the global recession has required centers to seek external support, usually through private or foundation grants, or as part of bridge programs. These efforts are occasionally successful, although bridge funding reinforces the notion of the center as remedial, and can therefore be potentially damaging to the center's institutional identity and relationship building activities.

2. Department/Area Evaluation

2.1 Description of the means of assessment of department/area goals. [Means of assessing outcomes should be based on typical and/or accepted assessment measures within the department/area]

Since 2009, data pertaining to writing consultations is collected through WOnline, a web-based scheduling and management system renewed annually. Demographic and consultation data is entered in phases:

- Clients create accounts and schedule appointments in the system, providing specific demographic and academic data.
- Consultants complete Client Report Forms on paper and in the system. These forms provide additional demographic and academic information.
- Clients have the option to complete evaluation surveys.

While the data from consultations is highly reliable, the evaluation surveys are not. The 2009 transition from paper to electronic survey has resulted in a typically low yield that represents the ends of the spectrum: clients are either overjoyed at the support or angry about the consultant, policies, procedures, or the center in general.

Prior to 2009, data from CRF and survey documents were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. In both prior and current situations, data is saved or downloaded from the system to Excel, and can be analyzed through the Data Sort feature of the software. Additionally, the most recent version of WOnline provides general reports on a range of data collected, and can be tailored to provide specific information.

2.2 Summary of the results of the assessment/s

Results of short-term goals and objectives assessments identify benchmark ranges of 1300-1600 consultations per semester, with 30-35 content workshops (excluding orientations) per semester.

Use rates fluctuate monthly, but overall capacity in the 2011-2012 Academic year averaged at around 50%, substantially higher than the 15% capacity of a normal writing center in the field.

An average of about half of all CWE clients are single-consultation visitors, while another 25% are 2-3 visit clients.

2.3 Recent improvements based on the results of the assessments

The CWE Director continues to reach out to faculty teaching EN 099 and faculty in International Student Services to add workshops and encourage consultations. Presidential Mentors Academy students are required to use the writing center in Summer 2, and workshops on APA and collaboration are offered (ST Goal 4.1).

SOAR Program revisions now include a place for the Writing Center to display services and distribute bookmarks during the first morning session. Prior to SOAR 2012, the CWE was allotted only a 5 minute presentation slot for parents only (LT Goal 1.4).

After a few semesters of informal training and two years of training conducted through Continuing Education, a formal three credit training course, UNA 300: Writing Centers & Writing in the Disciplines: Theory & Practice, was approved by the University Curriculum Committee and will be offered each Fall semester (LT Goal 2.1).

Instead of relying on opening orientations, a monthly staff meeting has been implemented. About two-thirds of the staff can attend this meeting (LT Goal 2.2).

2.4 Appropriate documentation to support the assessment of departmental/area goals

Documentation for all assessment data may be found on the writing center website at <http://www.una.edu/writingcenter> under the "reports" section.

2.5 Brief analysis of those areas in need of improvement and an action plan for improvement in these areas

The CWE must continue to improve the quality of resources, especially those available on the web

3. Facilities and Resources that address the adequacy of resources and support services to support the goals and objectives of the department/area

3.1 Equipment

Current equipment is largely up to standard, although the anticipated move to the academic Commons Building in 2014 will substantially improve the quality of the computers. A book budget of \$1000 for adding and upgrading the CWE library needs to be part of the goal for each year.

3.2 Space

The current space in Collier Library is adequate, although the anticipated move to the academic Commons Building in 2014 will substantially improve the quality of the physical space.

3.3 Staff

The addition of an Assistant Director beginning October 1, 2012 will dramatically improve the quality and frequency of training in the CWE. Having lost half the CWE staff to graduation in 2011-2012, this addition is crucial to bringing new employees up to speed quickly.

3.4 Other

Travel money is needed so that the Director and Consultants can attend conferences in the field. \$3,000 would be adequate.

4. Achievements

In February 2012, five writing consultants participated in the Southeastern Writing Center Association Regional Conference at Eastern Kentucky University in Richmond, KY. These consultants received the SWCA scholarship award for their presentation, entitled "New Media in the Writing Center."

5. Responses to Previous Review Recommendations

This is the first five-year review for the Center for Writing Excellence. As such, there are no previous review recommendations.

6. Vision and Plans for the Future of the area

It is anticipated that by the 2012-2013 academic year, the Center for Writing Excellence will become part of the Academic Success Center. With the completion of the proposed Academic Commons Building, the Center will relocate to the second floor of that facility, where it will share physical resources with other academic success offices. Center goals, programs, staffing, and budget will be re-evaluated at that point.

7. Unit Recommendations

7.1 Recommendations for changes, which are within the control of the department/area, if appropriate

Recommendations cannot be made until relocation to the Academic Commons Building is complete, as the new arrangement of offices will substantially affect programming components, processes, etc.

7.2 Recommendations for changes that require action at the Vice President, Provost, or higher levels.

A supply budget increase of \$4,000 for travel and books is requested.