



# Spring 2012 Program Review Writing Tutoring Program

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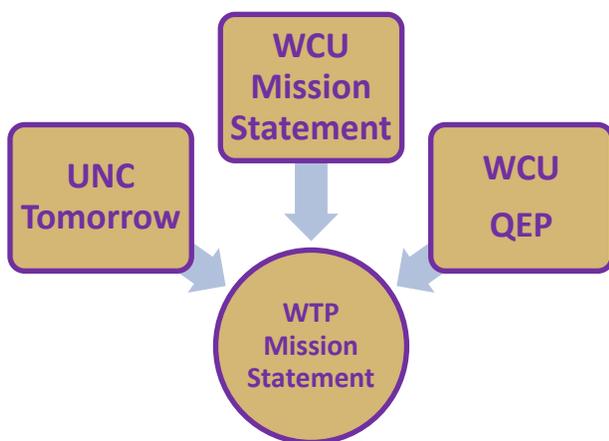
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## I. Introduction

On April 16-17, 2012, the Writing Tutoring Program (WTP) in the Writing and Learning Commons (WaLC) was reviewed by a three member review team: Dr. Michael Pemberton (Georgia Southern University), Dr. Debra Burke (Western Carolina University), and Dr. Laura DeWald (Western Carolina University). As a part of the review process, the team met with WCU administrators, faculty, staff, and students who were significant stakeholders in WTP's mission. Among those interviewed were Interim Provost Beth Tyson Lofquist, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Studies Carol Burton, WaLC Associate Director Leah Hampton, WaLC Director Chesney Reich, members of the WTP Affiliate Offices both within and outside of Undergraduate Studies, Assessment Coordinator David Onder, WTP staff member Carrie Hachadurian, select faculty from departments across the curriculum, graduate student tutors, undergraduate Writing Fellows, and selected graduate and undergraduate students who have used WTP services. The complete schedule of meetings is in Appendix 1.

As described in the unit's self-study, the current incarnation of the WTP is significantly different from the writing center which existed on the WCU campus for the previous thirty years. Though the unit underwent a number of administrative and location changes during that time (moving into the Hunter library, affiliating with Advising and Enrollment Management offices, coming under the direction of the Office of Undergraduate Studies), it has undergone far more significant changes since 2007. Between 2007 and the present, the WTP has changed its staffing model for in-house tutors by employing only graduate students for its one-on-one conferences; added a Writing Fellows program staffed by undergraduate students to work with faculty and provide discipline-specific writing assistance to students in select courses; and merged its services and instructional mission with the Catamount Academic Tutoring Center to form the Writing and Learning Commons. The pending relocation of the WaLC Unit to the Belk Building represents yet another change for the WTP that may have significant implications for its overall clientele and on the numbers of students it serves.

## II. WTP Alignment with Institutional Goals



The WTP is an open-access center that provides writing assistance and tutorial instruction to students at all stages of their academic careers and at all levels of writing ability.

Undergraduate students, graduate students, ESL students, and students working on writing projects in any course are welcome to visit the WTP by making appointments in advance or, in some cases, on a walk-in basis.

WCU Mission Statement: The WTP's instructional mission aligns well with several of

the core values outlined in WCU's mission statement. One of WCU's "espoused core values," for example, is that WCU graduates should demonstrate "[i]ntegrity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and both written and oral communication skills"; each of these qualities and skills is directly linked to the educational and teaching goals of the WTP. Writing, and academic writing in particular, requires students to apply critical thinking skills to assigned tasks, analyze and

synthesize information, and express the results in written forms that adhere to the conventions of disciplinary genres. The WTP helps students develop many of these skills through one-on-one tutoring and the supplemental resources it makes available for reference, research, and self-paced learning.

*WCU Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP):* The WTP also does an exemplary job of supporting many of the goals in the university’s QEP, “Synthesis: A Pathway to Intentional Learning.” Just as the QEP stresses the need for students to integrate their curricular and co-curricular activities into a unified academic experience, the WTP helps students to develop the communication skills they need to accomplish this integration. It supports courses and coursework that address the goals of the QEP; works with students to develop and articulate their career and learning plans; and assists students working on proposals, internship and co-op applications, and reflective essays, all of which are important components of “WCU’s Pathway to Synthesis Learning.”

*UNC-Tomorrow:* According to the *UNC Tomorrow Commission Final Report*, “today’s college graduates need to develop ‘soft skills’ – those capabilities including the ability to think critically, reason analytically, solve problems, communicate clearly both orally and in writing, work in teams, and be comfortable within a diverse workforce” (p. 13). The WTP’s mission also addresses this critical need, supporting not merely written communication skills but also the critical thinking, problem-solving, and reasoning skills that are highly valued by employers in every economic sector.

*The WTP Mission Statement:* At present, the WTP Mission Statement is essentially a list of the services it currently provides. While the review team was very impressed with that list (specifics of which are discussed in the next section of this report), it does not yet fulfill the main purposes of a mission statement which are to describe the unit’s educational goals, the unique service it provides to WCU students, and the learning outcomes it expects to achieve through its efforts. Ideally, a revised mission statement will help the WTP prioritize its services, allocate resources, and give it a clear direction for future initiatives. We recommend the WTP take advantage of its Advisory Board to work collaboratively to construct a new mission statement and to develop pathways to further align its instructional goals with those the institution also promotes and values.

### III. WTP Programs and Services



The primary functions of the WTP as described in its self-study are to: (1) provide “face to face, one-on-one and group writing consultations”; (2) deliver in-class writing and research skills workshops; (3) consult with faculty on assignment design; (4) offer ESL tutoring to non-native English speakers at WCU who need help with language-related issues in writing; (5) administer a campus-wide, multidisciplinary Writing Fellows program; and (6) train both graduate and undergraduate students for

their assigned work in the WTP and supply them with additional opportunities for academic and personal growth. Each of these functions will be addressed and assessed in the subsequent sections.

*Individual and Group Writing Conferences:* One-on-one tutoring is the core function of the WTP and the one that aligns most explicitly with the WaLC's focus on individualized discipline-specific tutoring. WTP tutors are primarily Graduate Assistants from the English department. In the Fall 2011 semester they held 1053 conferences with 534 different students, and these numbers have remained relatively constant since Fall 2008. Both the number of student appointments and the number of students served is consistent with national norms, though it is difficult to get a clear picture of how well current tutoring resources (in terms of available time slots for tutoring appointments) are meeting student demand as usage statistics do not indicate how the total number of hours tutored (782.69) compares with the total number of tutoring hours available. The tutors we interviewed said that business in the WTP is slow at the beginning of each semester (unsurprising as few students have writing assignments due in the first few weeks) but picks up substantially in subsequent weeks. The slow "business" time is used for tutor training, and the tutors also work on projects that support the WTP. Though we did not have a chance to review detailed appointment schedules for the entire semester, the tutors, WaLC/WTP administrators, and the WaLC Administrative Assistant indicated that appointments were often in high demand and that additional tutor hours could easily be filled if they became available.

That said, it appeared to those of us on the review team that several of the procedures enacted by the WTP to manage student appointments could be off-putting to students and dissuade them from getting the writing assistance they need. For example, students cannot make their own writing appointments online; they are required to call the WTP and speak with the receptionist, who will ask them a series of questions about their papers and assignments and make the appointment for them. If their paper drafts are more than 6 pages in length, students are told they must email drafts to the WTP well in advance of their appointment time so that tutors will be able to read the essays before the session. "If we do not receive your paper in time for your tutor to read it in advance," the Web site says, "your appointment will be cancelled." Students are told to bring two copies of their papers to the session as well as a list of issues they would like addressed. Drop-in appointments are possible, but are "granted on a case-by-case basis, based on tutor availability and other factors." The WaLC *Policies for Students* document (<http://www.wcu.edu/28112.asp>) contains two single-spaced pages of rules and prohibitions, beginning with a section on "Policy Enforcement" and a list of potential penalties for missing appointments. Though the WTP itself does not appear to apply or enforce these policies to the extent that the WaLC does with course tutoring, the language could certainly be seen as less than inviting and may be especially daunting to weaker students, students with writing anxieties, students who don't feel they should have to be "screened" before making an appointment and students who may already feel uneasy about coming to the WTP to get help.

Several of the undergraduate students we spoke with said they did not feel the appointment policies were terribly difficult to manage or overly oppressive, but the majority of these students tended to have very strong time management skills, and were motivated, engaged, and committed to seeking out resources that would help them succeed at WCU. A few of them, in fact, were casually dismissive of students whose dedication to academics and whose ability to plan ahead were not as practiced as theirs. While we were certainly impressed by these students (and they had many glowing things to say about the WTP and the writing help they received

there), the review team felt that there might be a great many other students who could benefit tremendously from tutoring but who do not see the WTP as an inviting or easily accessible service. The WTP should re-examine some of its existing appointment policies and make it easier and less intimidating for students to get tutoring help. Possible ways to accomplish this could include:

- 1.) Find a software alternative to TutorTrac, which does not currently allow students to make appointments for writing tutoring either in the WTP or online. Other scheduling software for writing/learning centers such as WOnline (<http://mywconline.com/>) or AccuTrack (<http://www.accutrack.org>) may be easier for students to access and use, more robust in terms of report generation, and more adaptable to the needs of both the WTP's and WaLC's tutoring services. Tutors and administrators alike complained about TutorTrac's general "clunkiness" and inability to generate useful reports in Excel format. The evidence seems compelling that the WTP and WaLC should research cost-effective alternatives.
- 2.) Give students more control over the appointment process, including the length of time they wish to schedule for their conferences. If students are able to decide for themselves whether they want a ½ hour or 1 hour session, regardless of the paper length, that will eliminate the need for the receptionist to screen every appointment. Some slippage will no doubt occur when students ask for longer appointments than they need or if they bring in longer papers than can be discussed in a single session, but the benefits accrued by making the appointment process more accessible and efficient (freeing up staff time, removing procedural obstacles, enabling students to make appointments from computers or mobile devices, etc.) could more than make up for any difficulties that arise.
- 3.) Consider eliminating both the requirement that students submit longer papers in advance and the allocation of tutor "reading time" in the schedule. While these policies might be beneficial in some ways, such as giving tutors an opportunity to read through an entire draft before a student conference to get a sense of how the manuscript is developed and organized, or providing GAs with time to practice ENG 101 and ESL teaching, it seems unnecessarily burdensome on students (in terms of the submission process); problematic for scheduling (having to allocate "down time" for tutors so they can read papers before conferences); and of questionable benefit in terms of the quality and/or quantity of tutoring work than can be accomplished in a short period of time, even with advance preparation.

Writing and Research Skills Workshops: The WTP and WaLC offer seven different workshops that instructors can have presented in their courses including "Top 10 Grammar Mistakes in College Papers," "Avoiding Plagiarism," and "Research and Documentation." The bulk of these writing workshops are delivered by the Associate Director of the WaLC, Leah Hampton, upon instructor request. The workshops are designed as generic instructional modules that "can be tailored upon request to fit a specific requirement or student population." In Fall 2011, Ms. Hampton gave WTP workshops in 24 courses. The faculty members who make use of these presentations clearly feel they are important, but since there is no explicit assessment mechanism in place, it is difficult to gauge how effective they are with students in either the short term or long term. The WTP has identified this type of assessment as one of its "opportunities for improvement," and plans to work with the Office of Institutional Planning (and other relevant campus service providers) to create an assessment plan.

If the effectiveness of these workshops can be demonstrated and communicated to the faculty, there will likely be more requests for these workshops, which could exceed the ability of the WTP to deliver them (there were over 1000 undergraduate lecture courses in Fall 2011). The WTP could consider letting some of its GAs deliver workshops, which would provide the GAs with valuable experience in the classroom and free up some of the Associate Director's time for other administrative duties. If the workshops indeed are "canned" generic instructional modules, they should be sufficiently scaffolded for GAs to be able to present them without difficulty. The Associate Director's role could be to help the GAs modify/adapt the modules to specific courses, if necessary, and possibly encourage GAs to develop new instructional units as special projects.

Consulting with Faculty on Assignment Design: Although consulting with faculty on assignment design is listed as a function of the WTP, this service was not discussed by faculty with whom the visiting team met. The self study indicates the existence of an online "Faculty Toolbox" with tips on designing and grading written assignments, with links to online mini courses and tutorials. The self study also lists the availability of one-on-one consultations with the WaLC Associate Director. However, it is unclear how often these services are used. The graduate assistants with whom we met noted that although they were rarely asked, they were willing to provide writing design advice to faculty on assignments. It is unclear whether there is no demand for these WTP services, or if instead faculty members are simply unaware of how to use them. Greater collaboration with the Coulter Faculty Commons might help to publicize and thereby enhance the implementation of this service.

ESL Tutoring for Non-native Speakers and Writers: Tutoring for ESL students is highly regarded by students, faculty, and staff. Several of the graduate students working in the WTP are in the English department's TESOL program, and they bring that expertise to work with non-native English speaking students in the center. The director of WCU's International Studies program remarked that the graduate students have a great experience working with ESL students in the WTP (and vice versa). They are often asked to take on special projects related to ESL instruction, and they often bring their own research into the tutoring center. Several of the undergraduate students we spoke with were ESL students, and they had nothing but praise for the tutors. One Middle Eastern student said that his English "has improved tremendously" since he started visiting the WTP, and others in the room echoed his statement.

Writing Fellows Program: Writing Fellows programs have a long history in postsecondary institutions, and many colleges and universities (e.g., University of Wisconsin, Madison [<http://writing.wisc.edu/writingfellows/>]; the University of Iowa [[http://www.uiowa.edu/~writingc/teachers/writing\\_fellows.shtml](http://www.uiowa.edu/~writingc/teachers/writing_fellows.shtml)]; Swarthmore College [<http://www.swarthmore.edu/academics/writing-program/writing-associates-was.xml>], and others) have implemented these programs in ways that now extend to nearly every department on their respective campuses in courses from freshman to senior levels. The details of these programs' administrative and support structures have been shared in many professional venues, such as a special issue of *Across the Disciplines* devoted to Writing Fellows (<http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/fellows/index.cfm>) and the book [Writing Centers and Writing Across the Curriculum Programs: Building Interdisciplinary Partnerships](#) (available as a Google eBook).

The Writing Fellows Program at WCU began in 2007 and works with faculty and students to provide one-on-one support for writing and to facilitate the revision process of assigned papers.

Writing Fellows are sophomores, juniors, and seniors who are chosen in a competitive application process based upon their demonstrated writing skills and interest in helping other students. Fellows are assigned to classes according to tutoring experience, expertise within specific disciplines, and faculty preferences, with no one Fellow serving more than 15 students per semester. Fellows have specifically enumerated duties and are required to enroll in two one-credit courses (ENG 220 & ENG 221) which focus on the theory and practice of peer tutoring (a review of these training courses appears in the next section). Interested faculty can apply to have a Writing Fellow assigned to one of their courses by completing an application and agreeing to WTP guidelines about what Fellows are expected (and not expected) to do. Writing Fellows provide written responses to drafts of students' major papers and then conference with them shortly after those drafts have been returned. They receive a stipend of \$800-\$900 per semester for their work.

Faculty, administrators, and tutors all speak very highly of this program, and student evaluations of the Writing Fellows are strongly positive as well. Of the students served by Writing Fellows in Fall 2011, 86% either agreed or strongly agreed that their Writing Fellow's feedback helped them to improve their papers, and 59.4% agreed or strongly agreed that they would use the WTP in the future as a result of working with their Writing Fellow.

Many faculty members are excited about this program and would like to see it expand, but in the five years since its creation, the number of Writing Fellows and affiliated courses have remained very small. In Spring 2011, only 6 courses and 7 faculty were served; in Fall 2011, only 4 courses and 5 faculty were served. The WF program appears to be a tremendous area for growth, but it seems evident that few faculty are aware of it, and those who are aware may be uncertain exactly how they might integrate a Fellow into their courses. Publicity and intradepartmental communication appear to be key stumbling blocks here, unsurprising given the significant demands and energies that would have to be devoted to such outreach, promotion, and education – a nearly impossible task given the WTP's very small administrative staff (a single Associate Director with many other duties, responsibilities, and affiliated initiatives to maintain.) Even so, if the WTP intends the Writing Fellows program to be more than just a small ancillary service for a very few WCU instructors, we recommend that the WTP find ways to increase awareness (especially among WCU faculty) of the opportunities for student and faculty participation in this program. This can be accomplished by encouraging faculty to recruit students as Writing Fellows, by publicizing the Writing Fellows program to faculty who might be interested in adopting it in their classes, and by establishing a cadre of faculty liaisons to work within individual departments to promote the Writing Fellows and other WTP programs.

Increasing the visibility of the Writing Fellows (and overall WTP programs) should by no means be relegated to the WaLC Associate Director alone. Because the Writing Fellows mission dovetails in many respects with the course tutoring provided by the WaLC (by embedding tutors in upper division content courses, for example), that unit can and should actively support and participate in the program. Students recruited as course tutors could be encouraged to become Writing Fellows and vice versa. The WTP Advisory Board and other affiliate offices both within and outside of Undergraduate Studies (Advising, Career Services, the Coulter Faculty Commons, the Hunter Library, etc.) can be instrumental in publicity efforts as well.

*Tutor Training and Professional/Academic Opportunities:* Training for all tutors and writing fellows is the responsibility of the Associate Director of WaLC (Ms. Hampton). Training for the

graduate assistants (GAs) includes several days of intensive training before the beginning of the Fall semester, ongoing, regular staff meetings, and on-the-job training and mentoring by the WaLC director and/or associate director. GAs who are part of the English Dept. MA program (but not those in the TESOL program) are also required to observe a section of ENGL101 (or 202) and take ENGL 514 (Fundamentals of Teaching Composition). In addition to the *St. Martin's Sourcebook* and the *Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors*, they read and discuss foundational literature as part of the weekly staff meetings as ongoing training. Core textbooks are available in the office and commonly addressed topics that appear in most tutoring texts such as directive/non-directive tutoring, working with ESL, LD and other distinct demographic populations, avoiding proofreading, working with papers on unfamiliar subjects, etc. are discussed during ongoing training. In addition to tutoring training, GAs also receive instruction on using TutorTrac, learning WTP policies and procedures, role playing, MLA/APA, etc. A "homegrown" tutoring manual gives guidance to new tutors and outlines a number of tutoring strategies to engage student participation and lead productive conference discussions. In addition, GAs must observe and be observed as part of their responsibilities.

Graduate Assistants are evaluated using session observations, staff meeting exercises and ongoing mentoring. However, there is little formal assessment of GA effectiveness from the students being tutored other than satisfaction surveys. Although these surveys provide important information, the WTP should develop additional assessment instruments that evaluate tutoring session outcomes such as cognitive learning. There are a variety of instruments used nationally by writing centers and in the literature that can help guide development of these assessment tools for WCUs WTP. Some examples to consult would include the assessment plan at Wright State University ([http://www.wright.edu/assessment/plans/uwc\\_plan04.doc](http://www.wright.edu/assessment/plans/uwc_plan04.doc)) and the schema for student evaluations used at Francis Marion University by Dr. Jennifer Liethen Kunka ([jkunka@fmarion.edu](mailto:jkunka@fmarion.edu)).

As noted earlier, there is extensive training for the undergraduate Writing Fellows who move through New and Senior designations as they gain experience and training. This training includes observing tutoring, and two 1-credit courses on the theory and practice of peer tutoring to be taken in adjacent semesters. Both courses are taken concurrently with the Writing Fellow's assignment. The texts required for both courses cover relevant topics, and syllabi for the tutorial component of ENGL220 focus on effective conferencing, along with a rather large amount of time spent on grammar knowledge and documentation style. The course schedule for ENGL221 was not included in the self study appendices, but course objectives indicate it builds on topics covered in ENGL220. Because these are one-credit courses, there is a limited amount of time available to teach students everything they need to know to be effective writing fellows. However, the Writing Fellows with whom we met felt highly confident in their ability to be effective tutors for the courses to which they were assigned; similarly, the faculty we met who used WFs were extremely pleased with their Fellows' performance.

Other Services: In addition to the primary functions of the WTP, the unit provides a number of supplemental services to the campus community and student body, including the maintenance of a Web site with links to writing, research, and learning resources; a pilot program to answer simple writing-related questions via Instant Messaging (IM Chat); and documentation for instructors regarding their students' visits and overall progress. In addition, "Smarthinking" is being used to provide online writing assistance to distance students. Feedback regarding this latter service indicates its pedagogical value is questionable, particularly given its very high cost.

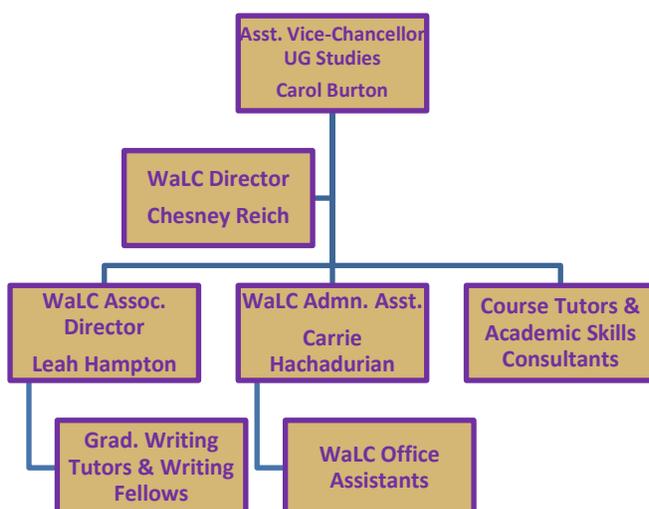
#### IV. Planning and Assessment Strategies

The WTP uses a variety of strategies to assess effectiveness and inform planning including TutorTrac statistics, surveys, observations and evaluations. Assessment of tutor performance and learning are well developed, although assessment measures of student performance (such as cognitive learning activities, planning strategies, and overall enhancements in self-efficacy) in one-on-one sessions is lacking. The WTP self study also compared organization and performance measures with peer institutions and NSSE/Consortium for the Study of Writing in College survey results. The effectiveness of in-class workshops and services related to helping faculty with assignment design is also unclear. Although assessment measures for the in-class workshops are currently being developed, assessment plans for the faculty assignment design service of the WTP were not discussed in the self study or site visit.

Although the WTP appears to support many of the goals of the QEP, assessment of how well the WTP is helping achieve QEP outcomes is less clear. A limitation of developing outcomes assessment for the WTP is related to the way the current mission statement is articulated. Development of a new mission statement where instructional priorities, a pedagogical philosophy and vision for the future are stated as outcomes will help the WTP develop assessment measures more directly inform achievement of their mission and QEP goals. The creation of the Advisory Board for the WTP is an important tool for assessment but also can help the WTP plan and develop assessment measures.

In light of the 20/20 Commission's work on the university strategic plan, the WTP should plan to align its vision, mission, and statement of values with that document when it is finalized, and it should also articulate a reasonable number of strategic initiatives and specific action items for future enhancement and expansion. Progress toward those strategic goals could be reviewed annually. For example, if one of the WTP's goals in support of its strategic plan were to increase awareness of the program among the campus community, action items could include disseminating a bi-annual newsletter, contributing news items about the WTP to existing publications, or scheduling annual meetings with a targeted number of departments. This methodical articulation of strategic initiatives and priorities could assist the unit when making decisions about how to allocate limited resources.

#### V. Analysis of Staff



**WaLC Organizational Chart**

Full-Time Staff: The full-time staff of the WaLC is comprised of three members, Chesney Reich, the WaLC Director; Leah Hampton, the WaLC Associate Director and supervisor of the WTP and Writing Fellows programs; and Carrie Hachadurian, the Administrative Support Associate. The unit staff members have the requisite degrees, credentials and skills appropriate to effectively deliver the WTP services. All constituent groups with whom we met were overwhelmingly positive in their support

and recognition of the value delivered by the WTP through the leadership and vision of Ms. Hampton and Ms. Reich.

Chesney Reich has a MA in English Education from Appalachian State University and was the founding Director of the WCU Catamount Academic Tutoring Center from November 2000 to June 2011. Since 2000, she has presented or co-presented at one international and two national conferences, published one multi-authored piece in the *Journal of SoTL* and a one-page article in the *Service Learning Sentinel*, received two internal grants, and served on a great many committees and advisory boards at WCU.

Leah Hampton has a MA in English Literature from Western Carolina University, has a background in technical writing, worked as a Lecturer in the WCU English Department for ten years (Aug 2001 – June 2010), and was the Interim Associate Director of the WCU University Writing Center (July 2010 – June 2010) before assuming her current position as Associate Director of WaLC in July 2010. While in the English department, she served as Assistant Director of the First Year Composition program and also directed a tutoring program in Cherokee. She has presented one paper at the regional SAMLA conference in 2003 and another in 2007, and has served on assessment, service learning, and first year writing committees, among others, at WCU. She recently received a full scholarship to attend the IWCA Summer Institute in the summer of 2012.

Carrie Hachadurian has a Bachelor of Arts in Professional Writing from Western Carolina, worked as a professional editor from 2006-2008, and has been in her current position of Administrative Support Associate since 2008. In addition, as an undergraduate, Carrie was a writing tutor in the former Writing Center.

WTP Tutors and Writing Fellows: Selection of students and their subsequent training for Writing Fellows appears to be rigorous and as discussed earlier, this program appears to be highly successful even though it is not widely used by faculty. Tutors in the WTP are mostly graduate students from the English department, representing a variety of sub-specializations such as Rhetoric/Composition, TESOL, and Literature. The training for these GAs, as previously described, appears thorough and regular assessment ensures their performance meets quality standards of the WTP. According to the self-study and WaLC Director Reich, the reliance on English department GAs in the WTP is partly historical and partly a matter of budgetary practicality. Because English GAs are not allowed to teach until they have completed 18 hours of graduate coursework, they are typically assigned to the WTP for 14-20 hours/week during their first year of study. This arrangement provides free labor for the WTP (because the English department pays their stipends) and allows the GAs to get some useful experience working with students and responding to their papers before stepping into their roles as classroom teachers. Undergraduates are occasionally assigned tutoring responsibilities in the WTP, but this is not the standard practice.

There are a number of arguments that can be made in support of this staffing model. Graduate students, particularly those who come from an English department, will likely have more expertise working with written texts than will undergraduates. Graduate students tend to be highly skilled writers and readers who understand how texts work, can analyze and solve writing problems, and have the rhetorical vocabulary necessary to teach new writing strategies to students. However, uncertainties about the number of GA positions WCU will be able to support

in coming years argue strongly for the WTP to be proactive in exploring alternative staffing models. Its current reliance on graduate students as a labor force coming largely from the English department is subject to the whims of state funding, changing university policies, and the needs of a single department. For these reasons, the WTP should work with its Advisory Board to develop a strategic plan to address its long term staffing needs. The directors of both the WTP and the WaLC expressed serious concerns about the center's ability to staff the WTP with the necessary number of GAs over the next few years. We feel it is important that upper administration work with the WaLC and WTP to provide, if at all possible, a stable budget line for staffing that will decrease its reliance on a fluctuating and unpredictable number of graduate student assistantships and the goodwill of a single department. As another step in this direction, the WTP should consider increasing the number of qualified and trained undergraduate peer tutors in the WTP and perhaps moving away from such a strong reliance on GAs for its staffing needs.

If undergraduate students are brought into the WTP as peer tutors, several additional support structures for staffing could be explored, such as the creation of internship and/or co-op opportunities for qualified undergraduate students across the disciplines. Students are frequently looking for internship possibilities, and many disciplines could see this as a productive and valuable way to enhance their students' communication and writing skills, and the students can be compensated with course credit and practical experience rather than a monetary stipend.

At present, the number of undergraduate students hired as Writing Fellows appears to be sufficient to meet the current demand, but that demand is minimal, representing less than 2% of the student population at WCU in a very small number of courses. Should the WTP decide to expand this supplemental instruction program to include more courses in more programs and colleges, it should examine whether its current practices for recruiting and training suitable Fellows will provide a sufficient labor pool to meet projected needs. In addition, the WTP should consider the logistical and administrative demands that would result from a significantly expanded Fellows program (or the need to rotate Fellows among courses should demand for their services exceed the supply) and plan accordingly.

Resources and Support, Professional Activity and Service: Performance is evaluated by the direct supervisors, in this case the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Studies and the Director of WaLC. Because unit staff members hold administrative appointments, they do not undergo the types of peer review that faculty do. Specific procedures and performance evaluation measures were not described in the self study nor discussed during the site visit. There is no opportunity for promotion in the WaLC Director and Associate Director positions.

Both Ms. Reich and Ms. Hampton are active participants in numerous relevant University-level committees and they were described by constituent groups the visiting team met with as "true University citizens who go above and beyond their job descriptions to promote the goals of WaLC." Like most units on campus, staff compensation is less than adequate but efforts are made to keep technological and other resources up-to-date. Requests for support resources beyond what the budget can cover go to the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Studies who funds them when possible. For example, there are a variety of funds that can help support travel to attend and/or present at professional conferences. However, a regular commitment of funds specifically for this purpose will encourage this type of activity, strengthening WaLC and the WTP by enabling staff to stay current in their professional fields, learn new teaching

strategies they can apply to their work in the WaLC, network with fellow professionals in ways that will enable them to collaborate with other institutions, and improve the quality of writing assistance provided by the WTP.

## VI. Analysis of Operational Facilities and Budget

The WTP uses their limited resources very efficiently and the program has found creative ways to make a tight budget stretch as much as possible. Although the location has changed over time, strong efforts by Ms. Hampton and Ms. Reich to make the WaLC learning environment a comfortable and welcoming place for student learning have been highly effective. The current location in the library has been less than ideal but the pending move to Belk should alleviate the space, noise and privacy problems. Although the physical separation from the library will make current connections between the WTP and library more difficult, the new location has significantly more space and is more geographically student-centered. Nearly all constituent groups felt strongly that this move will have many more benefits than disadvantages in delivering the multitude of programs and functions of the WaLC and WTP.

Given the significant role the WTP plays in student success, retention, and implementation of QEP goals related to enhancing student communication skills, it is woefully underfunded. The only way the WTP can sustain or expand existing initiatives and develop new ones is to provide it with the resources it needs to do so. The unit is currently doing as much as it can possibly do under the present circumstances. As discussed earlier, WTP internships can help alleviate staffing woes without exacerbating budgetary constraints, but this strategy alone will be inadequate to fully address future needs.

## VII. Summary of Unit Strengths

- 1.) Universal support. The positive support and appreciation for the value of what Ms. Hampton and Ms. Reich do for WCU is overwhelming. The strong passion and advocacy for supporting and improving student writing on campus were reflected in praise expressed by all constituent groups. In addition, the strong leadership and vision for the WTP and WaLC is recognized and respected by administrators, faculty and staff.
- 2.) Strong relationships. The WTP maintains strong, productive and healthy relationships with many units across campus. Connections with the English Department are healthy and synergistic, and connections and outreach with first year and transition academic and support programs are particularly strong. The WTP's outreach to the English department, particularly to lower division composition courses, is an integral part of its mission and thus the healthy and mutually supportive relationship between the WTP and English Department is especially positive. English department faculty are uniform in their praise for the WTP, both in terms of the training that their graduate students receive and the quality of writing assistance provided to students. The goals of the WTP are consistent with and (where resources are sufficient) effectively support communication learning outcomes of the QEP.

- 3.) High quality training. Training provided to the tutors and writing fellows is very high quality. Tutors and writing fellows are confident in performing their jobs and feel empowered to work as professionals, and student users of the WTP are getting more out of their tutoring sessions than they expect. The Writing Fellows program is a very effective way to support faculty efforts to improve writing at the course level and may be especially useful for upper division courses in the majors. Consistent with QEP goals, the WTP is developing learning outcomes to assess student tutor effectiveness
- 4.) Efficient and creative use of resources. The WTP uses their limited resources very efficiently and finds creative ways to make the best of a resource-limited situation. The merger between the CAT and WTP centers into the consolidated WaLC was viewed as positive by all constituent groups and viewed as improving opportunities for administrative efficiency and facilitating natural synergies between the two centers. The pending move of WaLC to the Belk Building was strongly supported by constituent groups. Regardless of the different locations over time and despite limited resources, efforts to make the WaLC learning environment a comfortable and welcoming place for the student learning has been outstanding. The move to Belk should allow this learning environment to be even better.
- 5.) Establishment of advisory board. The creation of the new Advisory Board comprised of individuals from academic and support units on campus who have strong interest in supporting the WaLC will help the WTP stay relevant and should help improve connections to a variety of constituent groups on campus.

### VIII. Summary of Recommendations

- 1.) Revise Mission Statement. In collaboration with its Advisory Board, the WTP should develop a new mission statement that establishes instructional priorities, a pedagogical philosophy, and a vision for the future.
- 2.) Enhance accessibility. The WTP and WaLC should reconsider their mechanisms for scheduling student appointments, seeking greater efficiencies in the process, making it easier and more inviting for students, and expanding the opportunities for walk-in appointments. Current hurdles such as having to work through the administrative assistant to schedule conferences and requiring students to submit longer papers well in advance of their appointments may discourage or dissuade students from taking advantage of the WTP's services at their immediate point of need. Further, the WTP and WaLC should explore ways to make policies consistent between writing tutoring and course tutoring.
- 3.) Explore alternative to scheduling software. One move in the direction of greater scheduling efficiency and better reporting of conference results would be to consider finding a software alternative to TutorTrac.
- 4.) Facilitate graduate peer working groups. The WTP may want to rethink some of its strategies for working with graduate students on theses and dissertations. One option would be to facilitate collaborative peer working groups for graduate students in the process of writing these documents.

- 5.) Address staffing stability. The WTP needs a strategic plan to create a more stable model for staffing, particularly in its one-on-one conferencing. Its current reliance on graduate students – largely from the English department – as a labor force is subject to the whims of state funding, changing university policies, and the needs of a single department. Upper administration should work with the WaLC and WTP to provide, if at all possible, a stable budget line for staffing. The WTP should also work to increase the number of undergraduate peer tutors in the WTP and move away from such a strong reliance on GTAs for its staff.
- 6.) Explore internships for staff support. Another possibility for additional staffing could come through the creation of internship and/or co-op opportunities throughout all the disciplines on campus for students. (Students are frequently looking for internship possibilities, and many disciplines could see this as useful, giving students course credit and practical experience as tutors or Writing Fellows rather than having to pay them a stipend.)
- 7.) Increase program visibility. In a related fashion, the WTP should find ways to increase awareness – especially among WCU faculty – of the opportunities for student and faculty participation in WTP programs and services. This can be accomplished by promoting faculty efforts to recruit students as Writing Fellows, by publicizing the Writing Fellows program to faculty who might be interested in adopting it in their classes, and by establishing a cadre of faculty liaisons to work within individual departments to promote the WTP's programs.
- 8.) Evaluate options to assist distance students. The university, Continuing Education, and the WTP may want to rethink both the pedagogical effectiveness and financial commitment currently being made to Smarthinking as a way to provide online writing assistance to distance students. Smarthinking's statistical reports indicate that the vast majority of their tutors' time is being spent on writing projects, and the per-student and per-paper costs of providing this service seems disproportionately high – far more expensive than it would cost for an online tutor housed in the WTP to provide an equivalent service. Informal student feedback about the quality of Smarthinking responses and contributions to their writing skills indicates that students are less than satisfied. We would recommend that the funds currently being allocated to Smarthinking be gradually reallocated to the WTP to support an online tutoring service for student writing (if and when the WTP decides it would like to pursue such a service).
- 9.) Consider alternatives to CC grade. Another potential source of funds that could be directed to the WTP through reallocation might come from recognizing how ineffectiveness the Compositional Condition program has been and taking the monies currently allocated to support and pay for English 300 courses and redirecting them to the WTP.
- 10.) Provide additional resources. Though it may seem like a common trope in most review recommendations, it is especially important to note that the only way the WTP can sustain or expand existing initiatives– initiatives that resonate strongly with the communication skills goals of both the university mission and the QEP – and develop new ones is to provide it with the resources it needs to do so. Repairing a few inefficiencies in the administrative system, streamlining the appointment process, and eliminating ineffective programs and policies can help, but the unit is currently doing as much as it can possibly do

under the present circumstances – more, in fact – and if WCU is truly committed to its QEP mandate to enhance student communication skills, then it needs to commit the appropriate resources to the WTP to help fulfill that mandate.

- 11.) Support professional development for staff. Assuming that WCU commits requisite funds to the WTP and WaLC for these purposes, our first recommendation would be to provide professional development funds to Leah Hampton and Chesney Reich to attend and/or present the WTP's work at professional conferences and other forums that would enable them to stay current in their professional fields, learn new teaching strategies they can apply to their work in the WaLC, network with fellow professionals in ways that will enable them to collaborate with other institutions and improve the quality of writing assistance provided by the WTP.
- 12.) Expand the Writing Fellows program. With additional funds, the WTP should also find ways to expand the Writing Fellows program, which has been enthusiastically received and praised by the faculty, students, and tutors who have participated. If additional efforts are made to publicize and promote this program – via faculty liaisons, the work of the WTP, and elsewhere – this program has the potential to become a vibrant, rich source of writing assistance on campus, one that reaches into every department to help sustain the communication skills requirement of the QEP. Individual departments should be encouraged to contribute to these efforts in financial and administrative ways; it is not unreasonable to suggest that departments making use of Writing Fellows pay at least a portion (if not all) of the small stipend these students are given each semester.
- 13.) Consider establishing limited satellite delivery locations. Satellite locations for the WTP with a limited number of hours (e.g., evening and weekend hours in the Hunter Library) might be a way to meet additional student needs for writing assistance at the times and places where students are most likely to require them.
- 14.) Expand assessment measurements to users. The assessment practices employed by the WTP, focusing on learning outcomes for tutors, are quite valuable and a useful reminder that it is not just students who are learning in their writing conferences; the tutors are learning as well. That said, given that the central purpose of conferencing and other work in the WTP is improvement in student writing abilities, some assessment mechanism should be developed to document the kinds of student learning activities that take place in these conferences. It is certainly unreasonable to expect the WTP to document or measure specific, quantifiable improvements in writing ability that resulted from a single half hour or hour long session, but the WTP should investigate other mechanisms for collecting data to demonstrate added value and/or student learning.

## APPENDIX 1

# SCHEDULE FOR WTP ADMINISTRATIVE PROGRAM REVIEW

**Administrative Program Review**  
**for Writing & Learning Commons – Writing Tutoring Programs – Campus Visit**

**April 15 – 17, 2012**

**{Review Team Members – External Reviewer: Dr. Michael Pemberton; Internal Reviewers: Debra Burke & Laura DeWald}**

<b><u>DATE/TIME</u></b>	<b><u>ACTIVITY</u></b>	<b><u>LOCATION</u></b>
<b><u>Sunday, April 15<sup>th</sup></u></b>		
3:00 PM	Dr. Michael Pemberton driving to campus from Statesboro, GA	Leah Hampton to meet Dr. Pemberton and escort him to Madison Hall.
4:00 – 5:30 PM	Review Team Meeting	Madison Conference Room A/B
Sunday Evening	Dinner– External Reviewer	
<b><u>Monday, April 16<sup>th</sup></u></b>		
6:30 – 7:30 AM	Breakfast – External Reviewer	
7:30 – 8:15 AM	Meeting with Beth Tyson Lofquist (Interim Provost) & Review Team	161 Hunter (the old Writing Center)
8:15 – 9:00 AM	Meeting with Review Team & Carol Burton (Assistant Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Studies)	161 Hunter (the old Writing Center)
9:05 – 9:55 AM	Meeting with Review Team, Chesney Reich (Director, The Writing and Learning Commons)	161 Hunter (the old Writing Center)
9:55 – 10:05 AM	Break	
10:05– 11:15 AM	Meeting with Review Team & Writing & Learning Commons – Writing Tutoring Programs Associate Director – Leah Hampton & Tour of Writing & Learning Commons – Writing Tutoring Programs Facilities	161 Hunter (the old Writing Center)
11:15 AM – 12:05 PM	Meeting with Review Team & Writing & Learning Commons – Writing Tutoring Programs Affiliate Offices within Undergraduate Studies: Janina Dehart; Glenda Hensley; Nory Prochaska; Michael Despeaux; Mardy Ashe; Jessica Ross; David Goss ; Will Shivers.	161 Hunter (the old Writing Center)
12:05 – 12:20 PM	Break/Transit to UC Dogwood Room	{Internal Reviewers will escort Dr. Pemberton to UC Dogwood Room}
12:20 – 1:10 PM	Lunch Meeting – Review Team and Selected Students	<b>UC CSI Conference Room –</b>
1:10 – 1:25 PM	Break/Transit to 161 Hunter (the old Writing Center)	{Internal Reviewers will escort Dr. Pemberton to 161 Hunter (the old Writing Center)}
1:25 – 2:15 PM	Meeting with Review Team & Writing & Learning Commons – Writing Tutoring Programs Affiliate Offices outside of Undergraduate Studies: Elizabeth Frazier; Scott Higgins; Connie	161 Hunter (the old Writing Center)

**Administrative Program Review**  
**for Writing & Learning Commons – Writing Tutoring Programs– Campus Visit (p. 2)**

**April 15 – 17, 2012**

**{Review Team Members – External Reviewer: Dr. Michael Pemberton; Internal Reviewers: Debra Burke & Laura DeWald}**

<b><u>DATE/TIME</u></b>	<b><u>ACTIVITY</u></b>	<b><u>LOCATION</u></b>
	Cruz; Freya Kinner; Sue Grider; Heidi Buchanan; Beth McDonough; Tim Carstens; Dana Sally; Regis Gilman; Tammy Haskett; Lois Petrovich-Mwaniki; Christopher Pedro; Laura Dinunzio; Will Shivers; Jamaal Mayo;	
2:25 – 3:15 PM	Meeting with Review Team & Select Faculty: John Habel; Maggie Orender; Steve Brown ; Margaret Bruder; Elizabeth Tait; Pam Duncan; Richard Starnes; Kadence Otto; Laura Wright; Chandrika Rogers (Basulabramanian); Forrest Caskey; Murat Yazan; Denise Wilfong; Martin Tanaka; Lori Oxford & Hollye Moss	161 Hunter (the old Writing Center)
3:15 – 3:30 PM	Meeting with Pamela Buchanan to sign paperwork	161 Hunter (the old Writing Center)
3:30 – 5:00 PM	Work Meeting – Review team only	161 Hunter (the old Writing Center)
6:00 PM	Dinner – External Reviewer	
<b><u>Tuesday, April 17<sup>th</sup></u></b>		
7:15 – 8:00 AM	Breakfast – External Reviewer	
8:00 – 8:45 AM	Meeting with Review Team & Staff – Carrie Hachadurian (Administrative Assistant, Writing & Learning Commons – Writing Tutoring Programs)	161 Hunter (the old Writing Center)
8:45 – 9:30 AM	Brief Work Meeting for Review Team	
9:30 – 10:15 AM	Meeting with Review Team & Undergraduate Writing Fellows (minus Director):	161 Hunter (the old Writing Center)
10:15 – 11:00 AM	Brief Work Meeting for Review Team	161 Hunter (the old Writing Center)
11:00 – 11:45 AM	Meeting with Review Team & Graduate Tutors (minus Director):	
11:45 – 1:15 PM	Lunch Meeting with Review Team & Melissa Wargo, David Onder	
1:15 – 2:00 PM	Brief Work Meeting for Review Team	161 Hunter (the old Writing Center)
2:00 – 3:00 PM	Exit Meeting with Hampton, Reich, Lofquist, Burton, Wargo, Onder & Review Team	161 Hunter (the old Writing Center)
3:00 – 5:00 PM	Work Meeting for Review Team	161 Hunter (the old Writing Center)
Tuesday Evening	Dinner – External Reviewer Dr. Pemberton departs WCU Campus, driving back to Statesboro, GA	