WRITING PROGRAM ACADEMIC PLAN

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Background Description and Academic Context

1. What are the Writing Program’s strengths and current assets?

The strengths and current assets of the Writing Program are primarily five-fold: 1) addressing the increasingly multilingual needs of students who arrive at UC Santa Cruz without having satisfied the UC’s Entry Level Writing Requirement (ELWR); 2) collaborating with the colleges to ensure a successful Core course writing experience; 3) creating rigorous and diverse offerings of Writing 2; 4) building cross-divisional alliances and writing opportunities for students prior to their major’s Disciplinary Communication (DC) requirements; and 5) preparing graduate students to teach first-year writing at UC Santa Cruz and comparable institutions. Collectively, these pedagogical responsibilities align the Writing Program’s educational mission with that of the campus at large: to enhance and celebrate diversity, and to encourage inter-discipline research and overall academic excellence.

1)

The Writing Program recognizes the multi-lingual reality of California middle and high school students. UC Santa Cruz moved closer to Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) status in fall 2012, and the Writing Program joins the campus in thoughtfully planning for the pedagogical challenges of teaching first-year writing to new university students throughout the second decade of the 21st century. As a result, many Writing Program faculty members are actively engaged in conducting research on best teaching practices for multilingual students in Core/Composition (C1) courses, ELWR courses, or Writing 2/Composition 2 (C2) courses—and all faculty members receive regular opportunities throughout the academic year to learn about and adopt new reading and writing strategies during brown-bag lunches, presentations, or informal colloquia.

2)

While the Writing Program at UC Santa Cruz does not offer courses in English as a Second Language (ESL), a number of courses are available to or required every quarter for ELWR-unsatisfied students—including classes that focus on grammar. Particularly distinct pedagogical experiments have been tested over the past few years, especially the two-quarter “stretch” sequence of Core courses: 11 sections at three colleges for fall 2012 and winter 2013. Writing Program “stretch” faculty members have worked closely with Provosts to craft tailored yet quality instruction for students most at risk for not passing Core in only one quarter. Writing Program
Core instructors have also employed new and more targeted tutoring options for the most academically vulnerable of the Core students to ensure efficient and effective support for them in their first quarter as they strive for ELWR-satisfied status—a key to the campus’s retention goals.

3) One of the great strengths and distinctive qualities of the Writing Program at UC Santa Cruz resides in its stable cadre of composition teachers who are professionally trained in the field of first year writing. Nearly 100% of the roughly 40 Writing Program faculty members have annual campus appointments, and the program currently therefore experiences virtually no personnel turnover. More than 1/3 of Writing Program Lecturers hold PhDs in disciplines relevant for teaching first year students but also as diverse as Environmental Studies, Cultural Geography, and Comparative Literature; more than 1/4 have joined the Writing Program after completing UC Santa Cruz degrees—all receiving solid mentorship in first year writing pedagogy at this campus. As a result, the Writing Program offers UC Santa Cruz students an array of Writing 2/C2 classes with a variety of thematic orientations but also with a set of common guiding principles around reading and writing skills.

4) Several Writing Program faculty members have been actively involved in a range of entrepreneurial efforts. For the past two years, for example, the Writing Program ELWR Coordinator has been working with the UC Santa Cruz Education Department, utilizing a $250K grant to help high school English teachers in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District prepare for new state standards in reading and writing. Other faculty members have participated in successful cross-unit writing partnerships, with Latin and Latin American Studies (LALS) and Environmental Studies (ENVS) most notably. Finally, plans are underway to initiate a Certificate in Writing option for upper-division students; UC Santa Cruz alumni who took courses in Journalism or Communication and Rhetoric (two now disestablished Writing Program minors) will be encouraged to contribute to and partially sponsor this endeavor.

5) The Writing Program accepts graduate students from a range of disciplines and requires a theory and practicum course for graduate students who will be hired to teach 12-18 sections of Writing 2 each year. Many of these students are mentored for several years by at least two Writing Program faculty members, and they often receive offers from college Provosts to teach sections of Core. By the time they complete their PhDs at UC Santa Cruz, they are well qualified to teach first year composition courses at a comparable four-year institution. In partnership with the Graduate Division, during 2012-2013 the Writing Program initiated a series of writing workshops and a colloquium for graduate students working on their dissertations. Four Writing Program Lecturers with recent PhDs planned and facilitated the workshops and colloquium: a very positive exercise in faculty
development.

None of the Writing Program's faculty activity and curriculum would be possible without exceptional staff support. Fortunately, the Office Manager is superb in running all aspects of the Writing Program's day-to-day budget, personnel, curricular, and space operations. She also supervises a well-qualified administrative assistant who is responsible for substantial clerical duties, student advising on the campus ELWR and C2 requirements, and ELWR logistics throughout the year. The Writing Program office move to the Humanities Building encourages inter-unit and intra-divisional collaboration and coordination, and has increased the number of students who walk-in for advising. However, the position of the administrative assistant should be increased from 50% to at least 75% in order to fully address the requests that come across his desk; this suggestion is in keeping with the historic staffing level for the Writing Program noted in the previous Academic Plan. A positive divisional response to this suggestion would also help to mitigate the Office Manager's significant (60-hour work week) demands. The need to advise distressed students who need to satisfy their C2 requirement by the 7th quarter at UCSC is significant and not an area that can be scaled back. Writing Program staff also meets a high level of scheduling, curriculum planning (~200 courses annually), and personnel actions; without sufficient institutional support, the Writing Program could find its overall intelligent and skillful management seriously compromised.

2. How does the Writing Program fit into the academic landscape of its discipline or field of study?

The philosophy and structure of the Writing Program's curricular responsibilities jointly drive its mission of excellence and innovation for first year writing instruction at UC Santa Cruz. All courses offered are designed to help students become more competent and confident writers of prose: to approach writing as an essential way to make discoveries about themselves and the world, and to communicate these discoveries to others. All courses emphasize the importance of recognizing audience and particular rhetorical situation and purpose, and all provide students with strategies of invention, organization, revision, and editing.

Together with the colleges, the Writing Program administers the writing components (C1, C2) of the campus general education requirements; administers the Entry Level Writing Requirement (ELWR) (formerly known as Subject A); and advises students about ways to fulfill these requirements. Writing Program instructors in each college participate in the college's core course (which satisfied the C1 requirement) and counsel its students about their writing. Each year, the Writing Program offers Writing 2 (a lower-division course that satisfies the C2 requirement); the Writing 20, 21, 22, 23 series to help meet the needs of students who have not passed ELWR, including students with multilingual backgrounds; and Writing 169 and Writing 203, which offer instruction in the theory and practice of teaching writing for peer tutors and graduate students, respectively.
The educational objectives for both C1 and C2 courses are published on the Writing Program’s webpage under “Quick Links”: “In completing UCSC’s two-quarter General Education Requirement in Composition, students learn how to become effective participants in university discourse, spoken as well as written.” Also published on the Writing Program’s webpage under “Quick Links” are two program assessment documents, both useful contributions to ensure a) that the program improves its overall curriculum effectiveness and b) that the educational objectives remain as uniform as possible across multiple offerings of C1/C2 with different instructors. Since the last Writing Program review, the General Education requirements and expectations of Core/C1 have changed; and the ELWR-unsatisfied student population has risen above 40%, a fact that impacts the teaching of C1 as well as C2.

Also since the last Writing Program review, however, new hires and current faculty research efforts and pedagogical innovation have not kept pace with changing student demographics whereby first-year students arrive at UC Santa Cruz increasingly exhibiting English Language Learning (ELL) and English of Multilingual Students (EMS) challenges in their writing. While holding occasional workshops or even summer institutes on best teaching practices indicate the Writing Program’s good disciplinary intentions, expert faculty with a scholarly profile in ESL or Applied Linguistics (Spanish and/or Chinese) are sorely needed. The opportunities for impact will be offered below under question #4. At the moment, the Writing Program admits that it cannot comprehensively teach the multilingual students that populate its Core, Writing 2, and especially ELWR courses; the full array of teaching strategies can neither be employed by present faculty nor passed along to graduate students taking the pedagogy course on preparing to instruct first-year writers at the university.

The 2007 program assessment, “Standards for Passing Papers in C2 Classes,” is a 95-page document that annotates nine papers from various C2 classes in order to articulate C2 principles and to demonstrate a range of student writing: high, medium, low, and not passing. The 2012 program assessment, “Standards for Passing Essays in Core/C1 Courses,” is a 60-page document that annotates eight essays from several college Core courses in order to articulate C1 principles and to demonstrate a range of student writing: high, medium, low, and not passing. This pilot study raised significant questions about how students write (and how faculty evaluate that writing) on distinctly different subject matter and in response to diverse assignments; it also provided a model for each college to conduct its own assessment and more precisely calibrate faculty and student expectations of un/successful writing given each college’s particular Core curriculum.

The educational objectives for the ELWR courses—Writing 20, 21, and 23—are also published on the Writing Program’s webpage under “Quick Links”: these ELWR courses “are taken by students who have been assessed or self-described as needing additional work on their writing after Core and before moving on to C2. Like all writing courses, Writing 20, 21, and 23 offer practice in both reading and writing . . .
on multiple levels. While the topics addressed in Writing 20, 21, and 23 will overlap with those in C2, these topics will generally be addressed in Writing 20, 21, and 23 with more explicit scaffolding and with more detailed articulation of the distinct strategies and skills that can be applied at any stage of the composing process.”

The Writing Program is currently in the midst of several assessment projects relevant to ELWR courses and to ELWR-unsatisfied sections of Core. Towards the end of each quarter, as select Writing Program faculty members gather to determine whether students’ portfolios have satisfied the ELWR requirement, the ELWR Coordinator leads norming sessions and provides examples of passing vs. not passing student essays. An assessment document with annotated sample essays will soon be published on the Writing Program webpage under “Quick Links.” Moreover, the Writing Program is continuing its ambitious multi-year assessment of the use of writing tutors for ELWR-unsatisfied students (a ~$45K annual budget that involves 70-75 writing tutors serving roughly 1,000 students); a four-year report on best practices, ELWR pass rates, and subsequent student success at the upper-division level is expected by spring 2014.

Throughout the academic year, all Writing Program Continuing Lecturers with an “a” 1/6th course equivalency take part in several program tasks essential to curriculum development, implementation, and assessment: the September writing placement exam that requires dozens of faculty proctors; the November writing placement exam and appeals readings to determine student ELWR status; winter and spring writing placement exams; regularly scheduled faculty meetings; etc. The process begins each September with the program’s annual retreat with committee assignments: grading, library collaboration, C2 research and pedagogy, ELWR and “stretch” assignments, etc. Committees meet once per quarter, and committee chairs report on their progress at least once per year at a program faculty meeting and then submit a short document to the Writing Program Chair at the end of the academic year.

Other ways that the Writing Program attempts to ensure active participation of the whole faculty in developing writing skills across the curriculum include different kinds of retreats and intellectual gatherings. For the last two years, several faculty members have partnered with Retention Services to lead a mid-September skills course for at-risk Bridge students new to UC Santa Cruz. “Stretch” faculty members, both new and experienced, also met for their first September retreat to exchange ideas and draft a best practices teaching handbook. Brown bag pedagogy lunches are also a regular feature of the Writing Program at which Continuing and pre-six Lecturers discuss topics ranging from strategies for teaching multilingual students to proposals for upcoming regional or national writing conferences. Partly as a result of these ongoing brown bag pedagogy lunches, during 2012-2013 several Continuing Lecturers presented papers at important regional and national writing conferences. In addition, pre-six Lecturers have been increasingly integrated into teaching the ELWR curriculum’s full spectrum—including the 3rd and 4th quarter ELWR courses, Writing 21 and 23.
The Writing Program’s primary internal mechanism to obtain feedback and assessment data from students on teaching and course effectiveness comes in the form of end-of-quarter student evaluations. These evaluations are central to Lecturers’ academic reviews. Lecturers are expected to read each student’s assessments and comments and, in their statements of pedagogy, to address any areas of concerns. Members of the Writing Program Personnel Committee read all student evaluations relevant to a Lecturer’s review—as do the Humanities Dean and the Divisional Committee on Academic Personnel. The evaluation form for Writing 2 is especially detailed and thorough in covering an array of skills; it was redesigned since the previous Writing Program review specifically to enhance feedback for faculty so that they might improve their teaching. Given the fall 2013 shift to a divisional online evaluation form, the legacy of the Writing Program evaluation form at this point is unclear.

3. **What societal issues or needs are addressed by the work of the Writing Program? How do the ideas, projects, or opportunities associated with it contribute to that issue or need?**

In addition to the ELWR tutoring noted above, the Writing Program’s signal contributions to undergraduate education are its outreach efforts and its commitment to excellence in first year student writing. Partnering with UC Santa Cruz’s Education Department, for the past two years the Writing Program has helped local middle school and high school teachers prepare their students for the rigor of college and career work through analytical reading and writing, as required by the new Common Core State Standards. The program, called Alliance for Language and Literary Instruction Effecting Standards (ALLIES), works with up to 40 English teachers from Watsonville, Pajaro Valley, and Aptos high schools.

The purposes of the Writing Program in concerning itself with outreach are to remain engaged with the present and next generation of California high school students—their cultural and linguistic make-up, as well as their personal and professional aspirations. Writing Program faculty share their pedagogy with K-12 teachers (in the long tradition of the Central California Writing Project, which the late Don Rothman directed for more than two decades). As a result, all teachers are challenged to enhance their teaching practices—and perhaps to recommit themselves to improving student retention at UC Santa Cruz; and Writing Program faculty can represent UC Santa Cruz positively to the greater community—as their public service contributions are displayed in other ways, such as teaching adult education classes for Santa Cruz County or volunteering to work with immigrants on acquiring or polishing their English language skills.

Now in its third year, the Humanities Don Rothman Writing Award honors the academic achievements of first year students at UC Santa Cruz. An annual October awards ceremony in front of family, friends, and writing faculty (who are also recognized for their pedagogical excellence) celebrates Rothman Endowment
winners with a certificate, monetary compensation, and essay publication on the Writing Program’s webpage. In fall 2012, four student winners (1st and 2nd place, plus two Honorable Mentions) were acknowledged; their essays were selected from among more than 70 submissions as the most impressive in demonstrating—as the award guidelines articulate—“serious engagement with issues raised in the class, including the importance and impact of other writers’ ideas.” Named for Writing Program emeritus Don Rothman, the Endowment this year should easily surpass the sustainable mark of $25,000, having received (sometimes multiple) donations from more than 40 contributors; the Humanities Rothman award for first year student writing is perhaps the Writing Program’s most visible and successful profile to the campus, and the Endowment serves as a way for the public to join with the Humanities Division in supporting and shaping academic excellence at UC Santa Cruz.

Opportunities for Impact, and Writing Program Goals

4. What strategies and priorities does the Writing Program plan for the years ahead?

As suggested earlier, the Writing Program recognizes the need to hire new faculty with expertise in ESL and/or Applied Linguistics who can bring to UC Santa Cruz new writing strategies to effectively engage UC Santa Cruz’s increasing multilingual student population. Recruitment plans have been submitted to the division to hire up to two Lecturers with Security of Employment (LSOEs). The pedagogical impact of two new academic senate members could be both immediate and far-reaching within the Writing Program and across the campus. ELWR courses constitute nearly 50% of the Writing Program’s curriculum offerings (and more than 50% of the budget); and faculty teaching courses for ELWR-unsatisfied students would welcome the addition of colleagues who are trained and practiced in teaching writing to ELL and generation 1.5 students. Moreover, faculty across the disciplines and the divisions work with students in DC courses whose English skills remain problematic even if they have successfully passed their lower-division C2 requirement. The opportunities for collaboration have never been greater or more promising.

In particular, the Writing Program envisions the possibility by 2016 or 2017 of hiring an LSOE who might be appointed jointly to the Language Program. The Chairs of both programs have already held several conversations around the future of the UC Santa Cruz campus: 25%+ Latino students, a significant group of Asian-born or Asian-language heritage students (who populate the 3rd and 4th quarter ELWR courses), and a growing cohort of international students whose language of origin is predominantly Chinese. A joint LSOE hire would engage in scholarship to help keep the Writing Program current in its field of composition studies (and the Language Program current in teaching ESL) while also building bridges with other academic
units such as Latin American and Latino Studies (LALS).

Pending such LSOE hires, the Writing Program is planning to hold a 3-day summer 2013 pedagogy institute devoted to current theories of teaching composition to multilingual students. A UC colleague, with experience leading workshops and teaching ELWR courses to ESL/EMS and ELL students, would equip UCSC Writing Program faculty with new writing strategies for first-year students who present increasingly complex linguistic and academic challenges. Prior to summer 2013, the Writing Program is also piloting a spring quarter 3-unit Writing 22B course aimed to support select post-stretch students concurrently enrolled in a section of Writing 2. The focus of Writing 22B would be to assist students with their research assignments in any section of Writing 2: to identify the skills sets needed to search for sources relevant to a particular topic; to analyze the purpose of sources and how each source offers different kinds of insight into a chosen topic; and to improve the linguistic facility (grammar, usage, idiomatic expression, sentence boundaries, paragraph transitions and internal control, etc.) of first-year students as they complete their final lower-division writing requirement. This Writing 22B pilot course (modeled after Writing 22A, taken in fall quarter by students who struggle with Core/C1 writing) expects to address various pedagogical concerns, especially in light of the UCSC Library’s budgetary decision to end Writing 2 research assistance (individual 1-hour library research sessions for each Writing 2 section) as of 2013-2014. For retention purposes alone, Writing 22B promises benefits for students from under-represented backgrounds whose academic preparation in high school often leaves them vulnerable to performing poorly on rigorous research assignments.

Ideally, towards multiple new pedagogical ends, in five years the Writing Program will look younger and more diverse. It will look forward to the next wave of composition theory more than it will gaze nostalgically on the halcyon days of process-focused publication and practice in the 1960s and 1970s. It will anticipate and create effective pedagogy for 21st century California students rather than defending past (and sometimes outdated) teaching methodologies. For the summer of 2013 the Writing Program is planning for a 3-day Institute devoted to immersing faculty in the national conversation around teaching strategies for multilingual students. Such an Institute, led by a current expert in the field, would admittedly constitute only the first of many steps needed to revamp the Writing Program at UC Santa Cruz; but present faculty are willing and excited by the prospects of applying the best ideas of their discipline.

Institutionally, the Writing Program is poised to enact its vision—in great part because of a more fixed financial model for mounting its ELWR, C1, and C2 curriculum. In addition, the program can realistically sustain a healthy mixture of senate faculty leadership, Continuing Lecturers, and Pre-Six Lecturers. Pedagogically, the Writing Program embraces the exigencies of multilingual and multicultural California. While many Lecturers wish for a more robust academic unit that regularly offered an array of the program’s upper-division courses, most faculty
concede that they are poised for a reinvigorated dialogue with the campus at large. The Writing Program's academic mission over the next five years will be committed to ensuring the success of all students admitted to UCSC, regardless of their skills sets or their cultural/linguistic diversities.