

FAQ for Writing Program Proposal
DRAFT
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Q: What is the focus of the proposed Writing and Critical Inquiry seminar?

A: Writing and Critical Inquiry (WCI) will introduce students to intellectual inquiry at the University with a focus on the practice of academic writing. The seminar will emphasize rigorous guided practice in writing as a discipline itself and as an essential form of inquiry in postsecondary education. The primary purposes of the course are to enable students to develop an understanding of the nature of writing, reading, and thinking as modes of academic inquiry and to enhance students' ability to write clear and correct prose that enables them to succeed across the postsecondary curriculum and within their majors. In this regard, the writing seminar will treat writing as a discipline and a mode of inquiry as well as a basic skill. WCI will engage students in the sophisticated forms of writing that characterize academic work at the university level so that students develop expertise as effective writers and learn to use writing to support their inquiry into academic subjects.

Q: Will the proposed Writing and Critical Inquiry seminar address grammar, usage, and related conventions of written English, which many students seem to lack when they arrive at the university?

A: **YES.** Although the course will be neither a traditional "composition" course nor a "remedial" course designed primarily to correct deficiencies in students' previous educational experiences, WCI will address the mastery of fundamental skills of writing while also treating writing as a discipline and a form of inquiry. In other words, the content of the course will include the grammatical, orthographical, and syntactical rules writers must master to communicate effectively and with precision. To that end, the teaching of such matters as usage, style, mechanics, and the conventions of writing will be included, embedded within a larger project of acculturating new students to the higher-level modes of thinking and expression they will need to master to succeed in their academic work at the University.

Q: Why is a course like the proposed Writing and Critical Inquiry needed at UAlbany?

A: The report of the Provost's Task Force on Undergraduate Writing (2007) identifies weaknesses in the University's writing-intensive program and the need to support students' development as writers and readers more effectively. Faculty support for a program such as the one described in the current proposal is widespread, and the Strategic Planning process identified

the improvement of undergraduate writing instruction as one of the most University's pressing needs. In addition, data from sources such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress indicate that high school students, even successful ones, are not sufficiently prepared for the sophisticated kinds of writing they will encounter at the university. Currently, UAlbany has no required course or program to help first-year students make the crucial transition as writers from high school to college. UAlbany lags behind the other three SUNY centers as well as its identified peer institutions in its support for undergraduate writing instruction. Available evidence indicates that courses such as the proposed first-year WCI seminar not only help students develop expertise as academic writers but also enhance student satisfaction and retention.

Q: What evidence is there that the proposed Writing and Critical Inquiry will be effective?

WCI will be designed on the basis of available research on student writing development and effective writing pedagogy. In addition, the proposed writing program will draw on successful models of writing instruction at other institutions in order to incorporate practices that have been shown to be effective in helping students develop expertise as academic writers. Moreover, the proposal calls for the implementation of an ongoing program of assessment of student writing and the evaluation of the writing program itself. This assessment and evaluation program will build on current assessment practices and enable the writing program director and staff to make adjustments in WCI so that it better addresses student needs and more effectively supports students' development as writers and readers. It is expected that one element of the evaluation will involve faculty assessment of students' writing in their upper-division classes.

Q: Will the proposed program be staffed by part-time, contingent, or adjunct faculty who have are not likely to have the kind of investment in the program and the institution that will result in effective instruction?

A: **NO.** The proposal calls for the hiring of professionals in the field of writing instruction who will serve as full time faculty serving at the rank of lecturer on 3- to 5-year contracts. This approach accords with emerging practices in the field and is in fact more responsible than the approach of many other institutions to staffing such writing programs, which often depend on graduate teaching assistants and adjuncts who teach on short-term or per-course contracts and are likely to have little or no formal training or scholarly backgrounds in writing pedagogy. Lecturers in the proposed writing program at UAlbany would be fully integrated into the life of the university and invested in the success of its students, but would not be expected to do research as part of their job responsibilities. They would have appropriate training and experience in writing theory and instruction and be expected to contribute to the development and improvement of WCI.

Q: Will UAlbany's Writing Center become part of the proposed writing program?

A: There is currently no expectation of a formal relationship between the Writing Program and the activities of the Writing Center. The UAlbany Writing Center is part of the Department of English, and its plans and operations are overseen by that department in the context of its goals. Because the WCI proposal emerged from the Strategic Planning process—and not from the English Department—the proposal does not define a relationship with, nor prescribe a role for, the Writing Center. If the proposal is approved, the new writing program director could discuss with the English Department what potential relationships between the Writing Center and the new writing program might be desired. The nature of that relationship would then be further defined in consultation among the English Department, the writing director, the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Provost.