Minutes of the University Studies Writing Committee
Murray State University
Wednesday, September 1, 2010
12:00 pm – Provost Office Conference Room

Present: Peter Murphy (Chair), Josh Adair, Misty Evans, Marcie Johnson, Jeff Osborne, Taufiq Rashid, Paul Walker, and Kelley Wezner.

Guests: Dr. Bonnie Higginson

Dr. Murphy called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm.

Dr. Higginson welcomed the members of the committee and let everyone know that they and this committee had her support. The committee has been formed for a number of reasons, one of which is to assist in implementing the student writing assessment portion of MSU's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). Her hope for this committee is to organize and develop the focus and purpose of QEP, and to help in communicating this message to the campus.

Dr. Murphy emphasized that as a new committee it is a "work in progress" and that his goals for the group were to:

1) bring faculty members to the group who coordinated a program related to enhancing student writing skills;
2) to coordinate efforts across the campus aimed at enhancing student writing skills;
3) create a collective intelligence; and
4) support each other in our efforts to improve student writing.

He pointed out that the idea for such a committee predated QEP by about 10 years and harkened back to his days as Chair of the Department of English and Philosophy when he urged the Composition Coordinator to expand the Comp Comm. to include membership outside the Department of English. That idea never got traction so here we are, doing it now, in part because SACS has required us to identify a skill or knowledge area to enhance for our students, but, hopefully, because it is a good idea in its own right.

WAC Program

Dr. Wezner said that Writing Ambassadors had been assigned by all colleges except one. The breakdown is as follows: College of Business (2 ambassadors), CHFA (2), Agriculture (1), College of Science (1), Education (1), and Nursing and HSHS (1). Dr. Murphy said that he emailed the college deans asking them to fund these positions ($3,000) and to provide money for mini-grants ($300) to faculty members who wanted to try new teaching strategies. Dr. Rashid asked if there would be money for prizes to encourage participation among students. Dr. Johnson said that in the past, WAC had had a student writing publication although no money was awarded. Other on-campus examples were *Chrysalis* (research publication/no money) and the FRE program (money/the opportunity to present their work during Scholar's Week). Dr. Wezner

suggested an electronic publication option. Dr. Johnson agreed that this would be a good option, as this would provide models for other students in an easily available format. Dr. Murphy suggested that these were all good ideas to keep writing in the "public eye" and suggested that members return to the topic at their next meeting.

QEP Writing Assessment

Dr. Murphy handed out copies of the QEP portion of the SACS Interim Report and reported that SACS had requested more data. Specifically, the data needed to be more current, of a quantitative nature, and was to include data from the writing intensive courses across the university. The revised report is due mid-March.

Dr. Wezner handed out a draft of a memo that will be sent to the college deans (Deans Memo) and asked for feedback. Drs. Osborne and Walker voiced concerns that using the Holistic Scoring Team approach might provide data for SACS, but the data provided no useful information to help teachers do a better job teaching writing. Drs. Osborne, Walker, and Johnson were especially concerned that the purpose of this assessment be "not only" for SACS data, but to be informative in improving student writing. While the short-term goal is to collect data this Fall Semester to use in writing the follow-up report to SACS in March, Dr. Murphy observed that the long-term and short-term goals were not mutually exclusive.

There were some questions concerning the committee's role in this process (Drs. Osborne, Walker, and Johnson). Dr. Murphy emphasized that his goal for the group was to function on the macro level and to provide support and advice to programs directly involved in enhancing student writing skills. Dr. Evans suggested that the Writing Ambassadors could play an important planning role in working with the college deans.

Dr. Walker pointed out the subjective nature of writing assessment and proposed a teacher survey instead. He handed out a sample survey used in ENG 105. Dr. Johnson advised that an orientation would be necessary. Dr. Wezner pointed out that the survey assumed that all the students were of the same writing proficiency level. Dr. Murphy was not sure that SACS would consider this an acceptable assessment tool on its own, but he thought that it could be used as an additional assessment tool to evaluate student writing.

There was discussion on whether and how this survey should be included in the Deans Memo. Dr. Murphy proposed two choices. The survey could be included as a stand-alone Option 3 or it could be incorporated into the wording of Option 1. After some discussion, the committee decided that the memo should go as is and the survey would be used in a pilot study in ENG and HUM classes this Fall.

Dr. Murphy proposed that the committee meet on Wednesday, September 15 at 12:00 pm. The meeting adjourned at 1:15 pm.