

Writing Task Force Report to Faculty Meeting 11-04-05

I want to provide you with a brief report on the progress of the Writing Task Force.

You might recall that last spring at the April or May faculty meeting I announced that CEPP had established the Writing Task Force and charged it with gathering feedback from faculty and students on the teaching of writing at Skidmore and to make recommendations to CEPP.

A number of faculty members volunteered to serve on the task force. From these volunteers CEPP chose six from a variety of disciplines and asked two students to serve on the task force as well. The 8 task force members include:

- 1) Matthew Hockenos from history and chair of CEPP
- 2) Lenora de la Luna from education
- 3) Greg Pfitzer from American Studies
- 4) Michael Marx from English
- 5) Katie Hauser from art history
- 6) Judy Halstead from env. studies and chemistry

- 7) Matthew Wilson (2006) (studio art major and tutor at the Writing Center)
- 8) Kendra Asplund (2007) (chemistry major)

The background to the establishment of the task force was that a number of faculty members expressed the belief that more research and data on student writing was needed before they could make an educated and informed decision regarding any proposals that CEPP brought to the faculty for a new writing requirement.

The task force began its regular meetings in September and I believe we have accomplished a good deal in the past few months.

First, we researched the writing requirements at the 21 colleges and universities that Skidmore describes as our peer and aspirant groups. The peer group includes (Vassar College, Colgate University, Hamilton College, Oberlin College, Bates College, Trinity College, Kenyon College, Connecticut College, Bard College, Franklin and Marshall College, Union College, Dickinson College, Gettysburg College, Sarah Lawrence College, St. Lawrence University, Wheaton College) and the aspirant group includes (Bowdoin College, Middlebury College, Haverford College, Wesleyan University, Colby College). We also researched the writing requirements at a number of other schools including: Carleton, Stanford, Wellesley, Goucher, Swarthmore, Amherst, Williams, Mount Holyoke, and Pomona.

If any of you are aware of a college or university that has an unusual or unique writing requirement, a requirement that sets a particularly high standard, please send me the name of the institution and we will add it to our list.

We intend to post the results of this research on the CEPP homepage in the next week or so in the form of a chart.

Second, we sent a survey to department chairs asking them to describe the writing in their discipline, whether EN 105 serves their needs, and what the department is doing to improve student writing.

We've received many responses but are still waiting for responses from some chairs. If you are a chair and have not completed the survey, please do so ASAP.

Third, all faculty will receive an e-mail from me in the next day or two with a link, a URL, that will connect you to an anonymous survey with 7 questions that asks you for your thoughts and opinions on writing at Skidmore. We ask that you take 10 to 15 minutes to fill out the survey and that you complete the survey by Friday November 11th. This is your opportunity to voice your opinion and to shape a new writing requirement.

Fourth, we also have the results from a questionnaire Michael Marx distributed recently to all of the English department faculty who teach English 105. The questions focused on how much attention they gave to grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and style in their 105 classes.

And Finally, we are about to begin surveying students and we may ask some you for help doing this.

Our goal for the rest of the semester is to read and analyze the data we've collected and begin to draft our recommendations and present them to CEPP at the beginning of the next semester.