

**A Proposal for Enhancing Writing Instruction  
in the College of Liberal Arts**

**Submitted by**

**the**

**Division of Rhetoric and Composition**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

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## OVERVIEW

On 16 April 2002, Dean Richard Lariviere asked the Division of Rhetoric and Composition (DRC) to prepare a proposal for improving writing instruction in the College of Liberal Arts (CLA). The goal of this initiative is to enhance the quality of degrees earned by Liberal Arts majors by ensuring that they receive significant and sustained training in writing.

The DRC proposal has five core elements to be implemented in cooperation with the individual departments and programs in the College of Liberal Arts:

- Hire a coordinator for Substantial Writing Component courses in the College.
- Create a College of Liberal Arts Writing Committee to create, coordinate, and oversee college-wide writing programs.
- Make a high-profile senior faculty appointment in Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC).
- Offer departments an additional 3 hours of writing instruction beyond RHE 306 for students majoring in Liberal Arts. The new requirement would be satisfied by either a lower- or upper-division RHE course or by courses offered within individual college departments.
- Create an undergraduate major in rhetoric and writing.

In addition, the DRC supports examining the feasibility of a sixth initiative proposed by the College.

- Implementing portfolio programs or capstone projects throughout the College to document the written work that students produce in their majors.

We believe that an initiative with these elements would heighten the profile of writing in the college and improve the writing of CLA majors.

## **WRITING INSTRUCTION IN THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS**

President William Cunningham established the Division of Rhetoric and Composition (DRC) in 1992 with a mission to provide excellent writing instruction for undergraduates at the University of Texas at Austin. The DRC opened its doors in June 1993.

In its first decade of operation, the DRC has created new courses (RHE 309S, 309M, 330C, 330D, 330E, 368C), revamped existing courses (RHE 306, RHE 309K), substantially improved training and supervision of writing instructors, supported a minor in Rhetoric and Composition, created a successful Writing Center, and developed one of the most sophisticated programs for computers and writing in the country. The DRC has also participated in the college's Technology, Literacy, and Culture concentration, in various high school outreach programs (UTeach Liberal Arts, Project TORCHES), and in numerous university initiatives for undergraduate education (FIGS, TIPs, Preview, Gateway, Connexus—Longhorn Scholars, Bridging Disciplines). Faculty members from the DRC support the graduate program in English by teaching in the nationally recognized concentrations in Rhetoric and in Computers and English Studies.

To this point, however, the DRC has not been involved in major curriculum changes affecting undergraduate writing within the university or college. The unit does not currently offer a major, and the writing requirements it supports are the same that have been in place since the mid-1980s when the university created the Substantial Writing Component mandate and (in due course) reduced the university-wide writing requirement from six to three hours.

### **Limited writing instruction for majors**

Currently, students in the College of Liberal Arts must meet the same writing requirements as students in most other colleges: credit for RHE 306 "Rhetoric and Composition," plus two courses containing a Substantial Writing Component (SWC), one of which must be upper division.

The general requirement alone does not guarantee that students graduating from Liberal Arts will be capable writers. Like the general UT population, roughly 60% of Liberal Arts students place out of RHE 306 "Rhetoric and Composition," and others fulfill the requirement by taking the course off-campus or by transferring the credit from another institution.

### **Dependence on SWC courses**

As a result, Liberal Arts students who place out of RHE 306 currently receive most of their UT writing instruction in the required SWC courses. However, college coordination and supervision of these important courses has been minimal, limited in most cases to a staff review of the SWC course proposal forms submitted by faculty. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the quality of writing instruction in these courses varies considerably.

Nor does the college currently offer an undergraduate degree in writing or rhetoric for students who want to follow careers in non-fiction writing. This absence is striking in a university that is nationally known for a top-ranked graduate specialization in rhetoric, a renowned faculty in writing and rhetoric, and one of the finest writing centers in the nation.

### **Lack of review of writing**

In some Liberal Arts programs, upper-division students are expected to prepare senior or honors theses to demonstrate what they have learned as scholars and writers. But these and other capstone projects are exceptions: many students in Liberal Arts graduate without a comprehensive department review of their written work and without a tangible record of their accomplishments in the College.

Yet each of these deficits or problems represents an opportunity for the College. Drawing upon existing faculty, programs, courses, and facilities, we believe that a new program can be developed in the College to provide students with first-rate writing instruction throughout their careers.

### **Lessons from previous experience**

However, we do emphasize *can be developed*. Past attempts to improve the writing curriculum at the University of Texas have involved ambitious reforms that were implemented too swiftly and unilaterally, with little preparation and inadequate support.

The E 346 "Writing Across the Curriculum" initiative of the 1980s collapsed under its own weight, its new courses compulsory in every college, imposing impossible demands on the Department of English and College of Liberal Arts. Classes were required before syllabi were written or piloted. There was limited consultation with faculty outside the Department of English and, finally, little enthusiasm for the reform.

The SWC requirement was implemented with similar speed, and, while support for faculty in these courses was promised (or at least recommended) as part of the initiative, not much was forthcoming. The classes continue to be offered, but their potential has never been realized.

### **A New Approach**

Drawing from these experiences, we believe that significant reform in the college writing program must meet certain goals for instruction and implementation.

Instructional goals. Any new writing curriculum in Liberal Arts must:

- Require more writing of students
- Offer more and better writing instruction
- Offer more confident and creative means of assessment

- Allow graduates to point to specific accomplishments in college

But we do not offer a single proposal that would limit how these goals might be met in a unit as wide-ranging and dynamic as the College of Liberal Arts.

Implementation goals. The implementation of a new writing curriculum must:

- Come in stages
- Be created and implemented with the enthusiastic participation of all departments in the college
- Be adequately supported

While we considered proposing major writing initiatives, we have progressively realized that the college is too diverse and complex to respond enthusiastically to homogeneous plans or standardized mandates.

Instead, we are proposing a sequence of programmatic possibilities for enhanced writing instruction. Not all of these can be described completely at this time because their final shape will be determined not by the DRC but by faculty in every department where writing is required. A successful new writing program, we are convinced, will be perceived as offering both students and faculty new opportunities for learning rather than additional requirements.

And so we recommend a series of steps for enhancing writing instruction, some to be implemented immediately, others to unfold over a period of years as faculty decide which proposals best fit the needs of their students and the capabilities of their departments. We believe all these proposals are feasible. But they also have substantial costs, both at start up and for the long term.

## **Recommendations**

We offer these recommendations, each discussed in detail below.

### Phase One

- Hire a coordinator for Substantial Writing Component courses in the College.
- Create a Liberal Arts Writing Committee to create, coordinate, and oversee College-wide writing programs.
- Make a high-profile senior faculty appointment in writing-across-the curriculum.

### Phase Two

- Offer departments an additional 3 hours of writing instruction beyond RHE 306 for students majoring in Liberal Arts. The new requirement would be satisfied by either a lower- or upper-division RHE course or by courses offered within individual college departments.
- Create an undergraduate major in Rhetoric and Writing.

In addition, the DRC supports an examination of the feasibility of a sixth initiative proposed by the college.

- Implement portfolio programs or capstone projects throughout the College to document the written work that students produce in their majors.

## PHASE ONE

### **RECOMMENDATION #1: HIRE A COORDINATOR FOR SUBSTANTIAL WRITING COURSES IN THE COLLEGE**

Our first recommendation, which can be implemented immediately, is to hire a permanent coordinator for Substantial Writing Courses in the College. This move will have a measurable impact on the quality of writing instruction in the SWC courses currently offered by the College. Shoring up and then reinvigorating the SWC program, already functioning for many years, represents a major opportunity for the College.

#### **Rationale:**

SWC courses currently offered by the DRC offer important benefits for Liberal Arts majors. But some students are required and many more choose to take their SWC courses in other departments and programs. The college can improve writing instruction significantly by giving professional attention and new support to its full SWC offerings.

The courses have been attended to only marginally since their creation. In November 1983, President Flawn approved UT-Austin's current SWC requirement designed to give students at UT-Austin training in writing throughout their college careers, particularly in their majors. In 1988, the Educational Policy Committee of the University Council recommended that the university more conscientiously sustain the requirement by providing material resources for TAs, faculty training, and course supervision.

The SWC requirement has continued, but support for these courses at the level originally envisioned by its proponents and the Educational Policy Committee never materialized, and the supervision of SWC classes has varied from college to college.

In some colleges, the courses have been closely monitored to meet the requirements for degree accreditation. But there has been no systematic or sustained support for SWC instructors until a Houston Endowment Grant for 2001-03 enabled the DRC to hire a coordinator responsible for supporting SWC courses across the university. In fact, the program has operated inconsistently and informally for almost twenty years. Official documentation on the requirement is remarkably scarce and the quality of instruction has not been monitored. In Liberal Arts, SWC course descriptions are routinely reviewed at the staff level, but there has been little faculty supervision of SWC curricula or instructional support for instructors prior to the Houston Endowment grant.

#### **How would greater oversight and support of SWC courses improve the writing of CLA majors?**

SWC courses in the major serve four key functions for Liberal Arts students:



- 1) Reinforce writing skills learned in the first year (or earlier, as with AP classes) that would otherwise atrophy.
- 2) Facilitate deeper and more complex mastery of disciplinary content—an especially important function in the Liberal Arts, which demand abstract thinking skills.
- 3) Teach the typical forms and conventions of writing in specific fields: the Psychology experimental research report, the Government position paper, etc.
- 4) Raise appreciation among students for the importance and value of writing outside of the fields of Rhetoric and English.

While SWC courses are often taught by dedicated instructors, faculty in disciplines outside of Rhetoric and English may have had little professional experience teaching writing. Just as important, many lack the confidence to do it well, despite their intimate tacit knowledge of writing practices and conventions in their disciplines. They often do not know the following:

- Where to go for pedagogical advice.
- What UT's SWC policies and requirements are.
- What resources for teaching writing exist (such as the Undergraduate Writing Center and Center for Teaching Effectiveness).
- How to use resources appropriately.
- Who among their colleagues might be interested in sharing their SWC experiences.

Until fall 2001, the DRC had provided only limited support for SWC instructors, chiefly through the Undergraduate Writing Center (UWC). These efforts have included class visits by UWC staff, some printed materials on writing, and a UWC Web site geared primarily to students. Since the mission of the fee-supported UWC is helping undergraduate writers through individual consultations, its outreach to SWC instructors has been restricted.

A \$300,000 Houston Endowment grant in 2001-02 made it possible for the DRC to hire a full-time SWC Coordinator for the university, Dr. Susan Schorn.

In the first year of the grant, Dr. Schorn was able to set in place many elements of a coordinated writing program, including intensive teacher-training sessions, one-on-one instructor consultations, a Web site, a materials library, a speaker's series, and a writing instruction award. She has worked with faculty from across the university to improve SWC course offerings and ensure that they meet the needs of students. Her outreach efforts provide a workable model for continuing SWC program coordination in Liberal Arts, and have allowed her to evaluate the status of the SWC program in the College.

Dr. Schorn identified the following problems in the SWC program in the College:

- 1) Lack of goals. SWC offerings in most Liberal Arts departments are not organized around any definite set of goals for student writing in the major.
- 2) Lack of oversight. The college does not currently have (and has never had) a standing committee on writing, an important quality-control element central to the original design of the SWC program.
- 3) Inconsistent certification of courses. The SWC course certification process is shrouded in confusion; decisions about certification are often delegated to staff rather than faculty.
- 4) Low morale. SWC instructors tend to feel overworked, and doubt the value their colleagues and supervisors place on writing instruction.
- 5) Outdated pedagogy. Instructors often rely on discredited pedagogical methods, such as requiring outlines, over-editing, and overly directive assignments.
- 6) Lack of assessment. Little effort has been made to evaluate the effectiveness of SWC courses or instructors.
- 7) Variability in quality. The nature and quality of writing instruction varies considerably from course to course. Some instructors use a writing-process approach that carefully integrates writing activities into course content over the semester. Others assign as few writing projects as they can, provide minimal feedback, and allow no revision of student writing. Some writing courses draw their entire grade from written work; others draw only 50%. Of course, a degree of flexibility is consistent with the spirit of the Substantial Writing Component, but plentiful anecdotal evidence suggests that students in some SWC courses receive little useful writing instruction.
- 8) Low student appreciation. Because the SWC courses are inconsistent or ineffective, students do not attach sufficient importance to the requirement or appreciate the opportunities it presents for documenting their writing abilities.

Current efforts by the SWC Coordinator are already addressing some of these challenges. Workshops, consultations, and materials on the Web site are improving teaching effectiveness and helping to reduce frustration about workloads. The teaching award seeks to publicize ideal standards for writing instruction, improve instructor morale, and demonstrate the significant value of writing instruction.

For these reasons we recommend that the College of Liberal Arts create an SWC office of its own with a full-time coordinator when the Houston Endowment grant terminates in fall 2003. The coordinator would draw upon materials and methods already created by Dr. Schorn, and adapt them specifically to the needs of the College of Liberal Arts.

Creating this office now will underscore the commitment of the College to excellent writing instruction and provide faculty outside of the DRC and English with much-needed support for teaching SWC classes. The SWC Coordinator will also play an important role in working with the proposed Liberal Arts Writing Committee (see Recommendation #2) and in developing other new writing courses in College departments (see Recommendation #4). Perhaps no other single move would so materially and immediately improve writing instruction in Liberal Arts as creating a permanent staff position for an SWC Coordinator.

### **What would an SWC Coordinator cost?**

Hiring an SWC Coordinator in effect creates an office and program located either in the DRC or the College. Keeping the position in the DRC would keep the SWC Coordinator in collegial contact with faculty and graduate students most directly related to her or his work. However, locating the position in the College would enhance the SWC Coordinator's independence and authority with other college units. Further, the coordinator would be well positioned to work intensely with the College Writing Committee (Recommendation #2).

The position would entail a salary at the coordinator rank (\$32,064-50,772 + fringe benefits of \$8,000-16,000), a staff line to support the Coordinator (as SWC responsibilities grow), a budget for office equipment and supplies, monies for SWC outreach programs and Web site support, and office space. (The current SWC Coordinator uses a faculty office that will be reclaimed in 2003-04.)

These costs will be significant, but the SWC Office will be a key meeting point of various DRC and college writing efforts, including the College Writing Committee (see Recommendation #2), the Undergraduate Writing Center, various faculty SWC and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) coordinators (see Recommendation #3), the Portfolio and Capstone efforts (See Recommendation #6), and individual faculty teaching SWC courses.

As such, the SWC Office could provide the core of support for the proposed College Writing Committee, offering office space, materials support, record keeping, and Web site coordination.

## **RECOMMENDATION #2: CREATE A LIBERAL ARTS WRITING COMMITTEE**

Our second recommendation, which can be implemented quickly after some college-wide deliberation, is to create a highly visible and active Liberal Arts Writing Committee. We believe that this committee is key to the success of any college-wide commitment to improve writing instruction. Representing every department in the college, it will—like the Promotion and Tenure Committee—establish goals and standards for the entire faculty. It will also give every department a voice and stake in efforts to promote new courses, new capstone programs, and improved SWC offerings.

### **Rationale:**

The university legislation creating SWC courses in fact mandated the establishment of writing committees within individual schools and colleges. Liberal Arts has an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to students by being the first college to make such a committee an active part of its academic life.

A College Writing Committee in the College of Liberal Arts would deal with many of the issues identified by the DRC as crucial to improving SWC courses. The Committee, appointed by and reporting to the Dean, would have the following charges:

- 1) to ensure the quality of SWC offerings in the College. The committee would periodically review SWC offerings in various departments.
- 2) to recommend, coordinate, and oversee writing projects and activities within individual majors. The committee would outline options for increasing student opportunities to write in their disciplines, from capstone courses and senior theses to portfolios of student work.
- 3) to make recommendations about additional writing courses and requirements in the College.
- 4) to make long-term recommendations for assessing the writing performance of students in the College. The committee would work with the SWC Coordinator and faculty experts in the DRC to decide when and how such assessments would occur.
- 5) to recognize, annually, outstanding SWC instructors and courses.
- 6) to recognize, annually, outstanding student writing produced in the College.

The committee should involve senior faculty from every academic department and selected programs in the College. The committee must remain a manageable size, however, so not every unit should be represented every year. Members should be drawn from among tenured CLA faculty with significant commitments to writing, preferably with experience teaching SWC courses. Much of the committee's work would be managed through subcommittees charged with

overseeing its major responsibilities. Overall management of the group might be through an executive committee reporting to the Dean.

The committee should include an associate dean, faculty supervisors of RHE 306 and RHE 309 courses/programs, the Director of the Undergraduate Writing Center, the SWC Coordinator (as a non-voting member), and CLA staff who work with SWC courses (as non-voting members). To provide necessary continuity, faculty should serve staggered two-year terms with reappointment for a second term possible (paralleling the procedures for university committees). Adjunct faculty with distinguished service in SWC courses should be eligible for service on the SWC Committee.

We anticipate a heavy workload for the committee initially, with more routine service once basic policies and procedures have been established.

### **What would a Liberal Arts Writing Committee cost?**

Establishing a major committee has significant costs in faculty and staff time. Faculty serving on this committee would need assurance that their time represented a significant service to the College—again, as service on the Promotion and Tenure Committee is currently recognized. They would need regular and sustained support for their committee responsibilities, including a substantial budget for duplicating, materials, and (potentially) travel.

We believe that demands on this committee will be significant enough to require the support of a staff person, perhaps shared with the SWC Coordinator. (See Recommendation #1 above.)

### **RECOMMENDATION #3: MAKE A HIGH-PROFILE SENIOR APPOINTMENT IN WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM**

While several elements in this proposal will entail additional DRC faculty and instructors, we strongly recommend an early hire of a senior scholar specializing in Writing Across the Curriculum. The person should be in place in time to assist the SWC Coordinator and the College Writing Committee in the initial stages of this proposal.

#### **Rationale:**

With 22 departments, 23 centers and programs and 46 different majors, students and faculty in the College of Liberal Arts research and write in many distinctive ways. Any new composition program must take these fundamental differences into account. The college's existing SWC courses, any new portfolio or capstone projects, and any new course requirements must be tailored to serve a wide range of students and faculty.

While DRC faculty can claim expertise in a variety of fields and technologies, we do not currently have a senior scholar experienced in managing the kind of Writing Across the Curriculum program likely to evolve in the College of Liberal Arts if this proposal is enacted. While we might develop such expertise, it makes sense to launch a new and complex program with a faculty member who has a successful track record in WAC administration on board. Writing Across the Curriculum is a well-established specialization for faculty in rhetoric and composition. Full professors with expertise in this area include Anne Herrington at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, David Jolliffe at DePaul University, Art Young at Clemson University, and David Russell at Iowa State University.

The responsibilities of the new hire would include the following:

- 1) Working with the SWC Coordinator to enhance the SWC offerings of all departments in the College.
- 2) Working with departments to formulate capstone projects and develop portfolio programs.
- 3) Supervising and training rhetoric graduate students selected to work in the new writing program.
- 4) Training graduate instructors and lecturers of WAC-focused DRC offerings, especially in RHE 309.
- 5) Assist the SWC Coordinator in coordinating College WAC efforts with the resources in the Undergraduate Writing Center and developing new WAC outreach programs in the UWC.
- 6) Develop and oversee assessment programs in the College writing program.

- 7) Representing College WAC efforts to the university.
- 8) Publishing and teaching in the field.

**What would hiring a senior faculty member in WAC cost?**

A faculty member with the stature and WAC experience we have described will be a major appointment, likely at the level of full professor. The offer will have to be attractive in terms of salary and support.

To take advantage of such an appointment, we also recommend that the College find a mechanism for offering support for recruiting several additional graduate students in rhetoric annually. These appointments should not come at the expense of support for current graduate students in English. Graduate students in rhetoric, working with and trained by the new WAC appointment, can provide significant administrative support for the College-wide effort.

## PHASE TWO

At the opening of this proposal we set out four instructional goals:

- Requiring more writing of students.
- Offering more and better writing instruction.
- Offering more confident and creative means of assessment.
- Allowing graduates to point to specific accomplishments in college.

The previous three recommendations (the appointment of an SWC Coordinator, the establishment of an active Liberal Arts Writing Committee, and the appointment of a senior faculty member specializing in Writing Across the Curriculum) would go a long way in a short time toward meeting the second and third of these goals.

Implementing the first three recommendations quickly would also lay the groundwork for creating the cooperation and engagement needed within the College to take on new initiatives to satisfy the first and last of these goals.



## **RECOMMENDATION #4: OFFER A NEW 3-HOUR WRITING REQUIREMENT**

We recommend phasing in a new requirement for 3 hours of writing instruction beyond RHE 306 for students majoring in Liberal Arts. The new requirement would be satisfied by either a lower- or upper-division course. The requirement would be phased in by departments. The current RHE 306 requirement would not change.

### **How would students satisfy the requirement?**

Under the proposed system, a student could meet the new Liberal Arts writing requirement by taking either a version of RHE 309 or a course (either lower- or upper-division) certified by the Liberal Arts Writing Committee as an Essential Writing Course (EWC). Individual departments would decide which option best suited their students and degree programs. In all cases, the course would satisfy one of the two existing Substantial Writing Component course requirements for students at the University of Texas at Austin.

### **Options**

We envision four major ways a department might establish its requirement:

- Open (unspecified) choice of RHE 309 or other RHE course designated as SWC.
- Specified version of RHE 309 or other RHE course designated as SWC.
- Custom-designed version RHE 309 linked to departmental course.
- Departmental Essential Writing Course (EWC).

Unspecified RHE Course. The following RHE 309 courses already in place would satisfy the new requirement:

RHE 309K	Topics in Writing
RHE 309L	The Writing Process
RHE 309M	Computers and Writing
RHE 309S	Critical Reading and Persuasive Writing

These courses provide instruction in writing in different genres and different media. Their content varies enough to suit students in a wide range of majors and programs. In particular, the "Topics" course has long served students with diverse intellectual interests.

RHE 309 currently provides the entire UT student population with a lower-division SWC option. Sections typically run at capacity both fall and spring. In particular, RHE 309K is heavily subscribed by students in the College of Communication. We hope that the course would continue to be available to students from many colleges and programs. But to meet greater demand from CLA majors, more sections of the existing courses would have to be offered.

While enrolling in any current 309 version (K, L, M, S) could satisfy new departmental requirements, we anticipate developing and offering more sections specifically adapted to the needs of students in Liberal Arts. (See Appendix A for ways that the RHE 309 courses might be adapted to serve the new requirement.)

On a space-available basis, upper-division courses offered by the DRC would also satisfy the new requirement. These include:

RHE 325M	Advanced Expository Writing
RHE 330C	Studies in Computers and Language
RHE 330D	History of Rhetoric
RHE 330E	Rhetorical Theory and Analysis
RHE 368E	Topics in Editing
RHE 379C	Topics in Composition

Specified Version of RHE Course. In some cases, departments might ask that students in their majors take some version of RHE 309 (K, L, M, or S) or an upper-division RHE course. A department specifying some version of an RHE course would need to consult with the DRC to ensure that sufficient sections of that version could be offered.

Custom-Designed Linked Course. A department might request to work with the DRC to develop specific versions of 309K linked to their discipline or specific large-section courses. Designing such a course would entail course development resources for both the DRC and the department to ensure that a steady supply of instructors would be ready to teach each component of the course.

Departmental Essential Writing Course. A department may request resources to develop its own writing classes suited to its disciplines. These courses—developed with the support and assistance of the DRC—would provide writing instruction at least equivalent to what students would receive in RHE 309. Such courses might be based upon existing SWC courses modified to become Essential Writing Courses (EWC). Currently SWC courses require 16 pages of writing instruction, unspecified opportunities for revision, and a portion of the course grade determined by student writing. EWC courses might require a minimum of three major writing assignments, revision and editing of all major writing assignments, and at least 85% of the grade based on writing performance.

Courses that would *not* satisfy the new requirement. We would rule out the following:

- RHE 360M “Rhetoric and Composition for High School Teachers” should not count toward the requirement. Future secondary school teachers should take a writing class in addition to their already required training and methods course. Moreover, we cannot afford to have slots in RHE 360M taken by students not pursuing a teaching certificate.
- Lower-division literature classes should not ordinarily satisfy the writing requirement (though “writing about literature courses” would legitimately transfer as RHE 309). The

Department of English could certify appropriate sections of E 314L (or other offerings) as EWC courses.

- Creative writing courses (E 325) would not meet the requirement on the grounds that such classes teach a highly specialized form of discourse. Creative writers still need experience as writers of academic, professional, and civic prose. Nor should creative writing courses be filled by opportunistic students uninterested in poetry or fiction.

### **How would the new requirement be implemented?**

The implementation of a new writing requirement must accomplish the following:

- Maximize options for students to complete requirements in a timely way.
- Provide sufficient resources and oversight to ensure excellent writing instruction, regardless of how the new requirement is satisfied.
- Support Liberal Arts departments in developing discipline-specific writing instruction.

The details of these new writing requirements would be worked out by individual departments and coordinated by the College Writing Committee. The Substantial Writing Course Coordinator (see Recommendation #1) would take major responsibility for providing instructional resources to departments and individual instructors, especially for the creation of new EWC courses. The DRC would be actively involved in advising departments in developing new versions of RHE 309 appropriate for disciplinary areas (such as the social sciences) and for developing sections to be linked to specific departments and majors. The WAC specialist (see Recommendation #2) would provide the expertise for designing the overall college writing initiative. Such a specialist has a thorough understanding of the discourse practices in different disciplines as well as a familiarity with the research literature on best practices. The DRC would also provide coordination with the Undergraduate Writing Center and, in some cases, with the Computer Writing and Research Lab.

Any new College writing course requirements would be phased in over a period of years and catalogs, enabling individual departments to determine what writing opportunities (see also Recommendation #6) would benefit their students most. Ramping up slowly and beginning with smaller departments would avoid the problems associated with implementing a College-wide program in a single step. It would also make it easier to estimate and anticipate the substantial resources any new writing requirements will require.

Clearly, accommodations will have to be made for the many students in the College who change majors; meeting any new requirement in one department may have to suffice even if a student changes departments.

### **Why not a single new required upper-division writing course?**

A successful writing program in a college as large as Liberal Arts must reflect its diversity and complexity. It must involve people—faculty, staff, and students—from many fields and areas. While a single writing requirement implemented College-wide would have the virtue of simplicity, it might not serve the needs of students or find much support across a range of departments and faculty.

To address concerns that students need more experience as writers, institutions such as Penn State and the University of Maryland currently require an upper-division writing course taught by composition specialists. However, such programs do not focus exclusively on writing in the Liberal Arts; most are driven by demand from engineering and business colleges for courses in technical and business writing. Designing a generic upper-division writing course dedicated exclusively to Liberal Arts majors would be a pioneering effort.

It would also pose significant challenges. CLA students at the upper division are typically looking for courses that help them in their specific programs. But because of the diverse goals of CLA majors, designing one upper-division rhetoric course to satisfy all majors would be difficult or inappropriate.

We know, too, that CLA students are apt to change majors frequently or enter the College for a variety of motives not tied to specific career paths. This unpredictability makes a flexible and diverse writing program desirable, particularly in a college with as many students, departments, majors and programs as in Liberal Arts.

Given these complexities, the DRC has concluded that requiring a single new upper-division course is not an ideal route for our institution. (The difficulties of this option, as well as the option to require 306 of CLA majors, are discussed in Appendix B.)

Instead we recommend offering departments the option of requiring an RHE course or creating writing courses of their own with an equivalent and essential focus on writing.

### **Is a new 3-hour requirement feasible?**

The proposed new writing requirement in Liberal Arts is a relatively small and manageable program. Here is why:

- Many transfer students will enter UT with the equivalent of RHE 309. Many institutions still require the equivalent of six hours of writing instruction. Further, many CLA students already take RHE 309 as a Substantial Writing Component course. The course could continue to meet this requirement for them in many departments. Because the new requirement applies only to CLA students, the number of students affected by the RHE requirement will be thousands less than would have had to take the E 346K course.
- Graduate students already teach the bulk of lower-division RHE courses. These trained and experienced instructors would not be displaced by the new requirement. The College

would not have to staff the courses with lecturers and regular faculty only—though considerable numbers of lecturers and post-docs would still be involved.

- While lower-division offerings in the DRC would be refined and realigned over time to enhance the new writing requirement, the RHE 309 courses are already fully developed and successful courses with a proven track record. They are popular with both students and instructors in a way that E 346K never could be.

But the logistical hurdles remain formidable, especially for a requirement that—for good reasons—might differ from department to department and major to major. Implementing a new program gradually also has potent complications, especially for students who might change majors. And departments may need incentives to add new writing requirements to existing packed curricula.

Additionally, this plan is designed to avoid the factors that doomed a previous writing initiative.

Through the mid-1980s, most students at UT had to take 9 hours of English. Six of those hours were writing courses: E 306 and one of an array of second-semester courses: E 307, E 308, or E 308PC.

A reform enacted in the mid-1980s eliminated the second writing course and substituted a university-wide junior-level writing requirement: E 346K, “Writing in the Disciplines.” This course was offered in four versions—Liberal Arts, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Business. Because of massive logistical problems and doubts that an English Department could teach authoritative writing courses in business and the sciences, E 346K was cancelled. However, the lower-division writing course it replaced was not restored. Hence, UT’s writing requirement was reduced from 6 hours to 3.

The course “Writing in the Disciplines” proved to be logistically overwhelming for the following reasons:

- Students could not place out of E 346K and very few transfer students could show credit for an upper-division equivalent. In effect, almost every junior in every college at UT was required to take the class.
- Graduate students formerly responsible for E 307 or E 308 were not eligible to teach an upper-division writing course. E 346K had to be taught entirely by regular faculty or by a largely untrained pool of lecturers.
- The E 346K courses were entirely new, under development even as they were being required and offered for the first time. In the initial (and only) year of the program, no classes were available for students in business or the natural sciences.
- The E 346K Program was initiated with a single sweeping catalog change and implemented simultaneously across the university, with vastly different levels of faculty and departmental commitment and support. Responsibility for implementing the new

requirement, however, fell entirely on one department compelled to staff the new courses with a pool of more than 50 full-time lecturers.

The program proposed here takes full advantage of existing courses and existing instructors. It allows departments to become increasingly engaged in enhancing the writing of their majors under their own schedules.

**What would an additional course requirement cost?**

Any new writing requirement would be expensive. Moreover, accurately estimating the number of students involved in a new program is virtually impossible, given changing enrollments, departmental demographics, transfer patterns, varying courses sizes, movements between majors and colleges, and so on. What follows is an estimate.

Student Numbers. We expect that roughly 2100 CLA students would be involved in the new writing requirements in a given year (with some variance depending on the number of transfer students who would enter UT with credit for an equivalent course).

Writing courses in the DRC are currently capped at 25 but typically average 21 students per section after adds/drops, etc.

In fall 2001, UT and Liberal Arts enrolled the following numbers of undergraduates:

<b>Fall 2001</b>	<b>Fr.</b>	<b>Soph.</b>	<b>Jrs</b>	<b>Srs</b>	<b>Transf</b>	<b>Total</b>
UT-Austin	8166	8476	9056	12911	(2076)	38,609
Liberal Arts	2848	2855	2785	3339	(701)	11,827

These numbers suggest that roughly 2,900 students in each class year are CLA majors.

Also in fall 2001, 328 liberal arts students took RHE 309 and another 72 enrolled in upper-division RHE courses. In other words, 400 Liberal Arts students in Fall 2001 would have met the new requirement under the current configuration.

<b>Fall 2001</b>	<b>RHE 309</b>	<b>RHE Upper Div.</b>	<b>309 + RHE UD</b>
UT-Total	660	107	767
Non-Lib Arts	332	35	367
Lib. Arts	328	72	400

Assuming that fall and spring offerings are roughly comparable, about 800 Liberal Arts students currently take courses that meet the new requirement in a given year.

This leaves approximately 2,100 students needing an additional RHE course annually (not counting transfer students).

Assuming the year 2001 as a baseline in the enrollment of non-Liberal Arts students in RHE 309, the DRC would have to offer 100 or more additional sections of RHE 309 or their equivalents in other departments per year to meet the new requirement across the board. That would be 50 additional sections per long semester or more. This estimate is conservative, based on an enrollment figure already exceeded in 2002. (We are assuming that future enrollments may be closer to 2001 levels.) Yet for good reason, any enrollment must be regarded as tentative.

Staffing Options. An additional 100 sections could be staffed in the following ways:

Assistant Instructors

- 50 at a 1/1 teaching load (with an additional course-equivalent of service in the CWRL or Undergraduate Writing Center)
- 35 at a 2/1 teaching load

Adjuncts

- 17-20 lecturers at a 3/3 load
- 20-22 post docs at a 3/2 load

Tenure-Track Faculty

- 25 at a 2/2 teaching load

It is likely that staffing needs for any new writing requirement would be met by a variety of configurations in the DRC or other departments, including additional AIs, lecturers, and tenured and tenured-track faculty.

Recommended Support Formula. It is useful to think of staffing costs in a formulaic way, with each group of 100 students accounting for 5 sections.

Such a group would require roughly the equivalent of one lecturer or post-doc position plus administrative and other costs (e.g. hiring costs, office space, duplication costs, equipment costs, allotment funds).

Departments that add the requirement to their majors and are willing to teach EWC courses on their own would be provided a specific amount of support per 100 students enrolled in courses that satisfy the new writing requirement. A dependable formula for support might provide an incentive to departments to consider offering EWC courses of their own to their curricula.

Similar support would be provided to the DRC for each group of 100 students added to the new 3-hour requirement to be satisfied with an RHE class.

Recommended Staffing Mix. Enhancing the quality of writing by Liberal Arts majors requires excellent instructors. Not all of the staffing options are equally available or equally desirable.

- Assistant Instructors. The DRC already hires almost all available and qualified AIs at UT-Austin to staff RHE 306 and RHE 309. The staff includes graduate students in English as well as many from Liberal Arts, Communication, and Education. Recruitment of sufficient additional AIs to staff all the additional section is unlikely. Perhaps 6-12 might be located.

One way to increase the availability of AIs is to attract more graduate students into the Rhetoric concentration of the Ph.D. program in the English Department. These students typically teach more RHE courses because they are not involved in instructing lower-division literature courses for the English Department.

Given the greater hiring success of students with specializations in Rhetoric, candidates for such positions are in high demand. Over the last three years, the English Department has made offers to 3-4 graduate candidates with a declaration to study rhetoric per year with only one acceptance. Providing top-off funds or summer stipends dedicated to candidates applying to the Rhetoric concentration would help increase this valuable pool.

The AIs who teach for the DRC are highly trained. But to teach discipline-specific writing courses, they will need additional training beyond what they receive for teaching RHE 306. Such additional training is routinely provided by comparable institutions, such as Penn State.

- Lecturers. While some permanent lecturer appointments in a department are warranted, we strongly recommend against hiring a permanent pool of lecturers to staff an expanded writing program. As experience here and elsewhere has shown, using lecturers in great numbers ultimately undermines the integrity of academic programs. Faculty not engaged in scholarly work can lose touch with developments in a field and resist programmatic changes. Such instructors do not to share the responsibilities or privileges of faculty status—including support for research, travel grants, graduate teaching, committee assignments, and departmental governance. Morale suffers, along with the quality of instruction.
- Post-docs. A more attractive option is to hire AIs who have finished their degree programs but have not yet found permanent tenure-track positions. These instructors have experience teaching DRC courses. They might be hired on a fixed-term appointment (three-year maximum) with additional benefits, such as travel or research funds, that would allow them to continue their scholarly careers and remain competitive for tenure-track positions.
- Tenure-track faculty. A sizeable increase in program size would require additional tenure and tenure-track faculty in the DRC to train instructors and oversee the expanded program. We cannot estimate precisely how many additional faculty might be needed; the demands will become apparent as the writing program ramps up, more departments sign on, and the demand for rhetoric courses increases. Increasing the number of AIs would



certainly require that the DRC run a second or third section of E 398T "Supervised Teaching in English." (One section now trains about 25 new instructors a year.)

Other costs. The new requirement could increase the number of DRC course offerings by between 30% and 50% or more. Consequently, there will be substantial ancillary costs and requirements. These include the following:

- Classroom space for the additional sections. Additional computer classrooms might be needed if the DRC is to continue to offer a high percentage of its classes in these environments.
- Suitable offices for additional faculty and instructors.
- Additional staff in DRC facilities to handle increased workloads and student traffic. The current two-person staff in Parlin 3 cannot handle additional responsibilities.
- Additional office and classroom equipment, including new copying machines, video equipment, funds for materials and supplies, etc.
- New office space. Parlin 3 and 5 are barely adequate to support the DRC in its current configuration. Expanded responsibilities of any kind will require new office space. Storage space in Parlin 3 is exhausted and the department's copier is located in its single conference space. (Instructors cannot copy course materials when committees are meeting.)
- New meeting spaces. Faculty in the DRC will need suitably equipped spaces to meet regularly with writing instructors from across the college and with new instructors hired to support additional sections of RHE 309. The only current meeting space controlled by the DRC seats only a dozen people comfortably and has no audio-visual equipment or teaching tools. The space also houses the DRC's photocopier.
- Ancillary expenses. An expanded writing program will likely put increased pressures on both the Undergraduate Writing Center and the Computer Writing and Research Lab. The UWC will need the continuing support it gains from a student fee. The CWRL may need additional support to make its computer classrooms available to more instructors.

Final caveat on enrollment estimates. Experience suggests a need for caution in using any estimates of actual student enrollments at UT. Should the College decide to pursue the additional 3-hour requirement, it will need precise estimates of student enrollments, transfer credits, placement credits, and so on to be certain it can handle fluctuations in student demand. Continuing increases in UT enrollment would have an obvious impact on the proposed course requirement. All projections in this section are estimates based on previous enrollments and enrollment patterns.

## **RECOMMENDATION #5: CREATE A MAJOR IN RHETORIC AND WRITING IN THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS**

The College of Liberal Arts could significantly enhance instruction in writing by supporting the creation of a major in Rhetoric and Writing. With one of the strongest faculties in writing in the country, a long-established national reputation for leadership in this area, and an existing concentration in Technology, Literacy, and Culture (TLC), the College would be able quickly to claim a premier undergraduate program exemplifying its core commitment to enhancing writing instruction. The existence of a major would make faculty positions in the DRC more attractive and enhance recruiting significantly, thereby supporting the overall effort to improve writing in the college.

An undergraduate major in writing would also provide students with a highly marketable degree, especially now that students are more routinely permitted to claim double majors. Students with degrees in Economics and Writing, Government and Writing, or Psychology and Writing might look especially attractive on the job market.

Students majoring in Rhetoric and Writing would also provide a dependable pool of qualified undergraduates to serve as peer tutors in the Undergraduate Writing Center.

### **Student Demand**

Indeed, more and more undergraduates who have taken RHE 306 and RHE 309 or one of the DRC's upper-division courses or who have, in fact, worked in the Undergraduate Writing Center as tutors are eager to major in Rhetoric. They often are attracted by the DRC's engagement with all aspects of literacy (pragmatic, historical, theoretical) and its commitment to exploring the technology of communications, most conspicuously through its Computer Writing and Research Lab. While other academic units are de-emphasizing the teaching of professional and civic discourse, the DRC is ideally situated to meet this student need.

### **Faculty Specializations**

Our current faculty include leading scholars in areas essential to building a coherent undergraduate writing and rhetoric program, one that would enable students to specialize in professional/civic writing, language and rhetoric, rhetoric and technology, or rhetoric and education.

Moreover, faculty in the DRC, including people like Tom Buckley, Sue Rodi, and especially John Trimble, have unmatched records as teachers who produce distinguished students, year after year.

	Instruct-ional Tech-nology	Rhetoric and Literary Theory	History of Rhetoric	English Language	Text-books	Literacy Education	Writing Assessment
Charney					x		x
Davis	x	x					
Faigley	x	x		x	x		
Ferreira-Buckley			x			x	
Roberts-Miller			x				x
Ruszkiewicz					x	x	
Slatin	x						
Spinuzzi	x						
Syverson	x					x	x
Trimble				x	x		
Turnley	x						

**Figure 1: Faculty Specialties in the Division of Rhetoric and Composition**

The DRC also supports two facilities with enormous potential for training and inspiring undergraduate majors, both of them with enviable national reputations for excellence and innovation: the Undergraduate Writing Center and the Computer Writing and Research Lab.

Given its faculty, facilities, and its connections with the Department of English, TLC, and other institutional resources, the Division of Rhetoric and Composition is ready to offer the college a prestigious new major in Rhetoric and Writing. It is a degree that could offer a variety of tracks, building on the strengths of existing programs and reinforcing the diversity of experiences available to students in the College of Liberal Arts.

A major in Rhetoric and Writing could be configured to help students follow career paths as writers, editors and publishers, lawyers and civil servants, or users and developers of communication technologies. While we could not present a fully articulated program in writing without more extended departmental discussions, a major with four tracks *might* look somewhat like the following:

## MAJOR in RHETORIC and WRITING

24 hours (18 hours upper division)

### 3 Hours specified RHETORIC

RHE 306 Rhetoric and Composition

### 12 Hours in a RHETORIC track (9 hrs upper division)

#### Track I: Writing and Rhetoric

RHE 309L The Writing Process  
RHE 325M Advanced Expository Writing  
RHE 330D History of Rhetoric  
RHE 368E Topics in Editing

#### Track II: Teaching Writing

RHE 309S Critical Thinking and Persuasive Writing  
RHE 325M Advanced Expository Writing  
RHE 330E Rhetorical Theory and Analysis  
RHE 360M Rhetoric & Comp for High School Teachers of English

#### Track III: Civic and Professional Writing

RHE 309K Topics in Writing  
RHE 330D History of Rhetoric  
RHE 330E Rhetorical Theory and Analysis  
RHE 379C Topics in Composition

#### Track IV: Rhetoric and Technology

RHE 309M Computers and Writing  
RHE 330C Studies in Computers and Language  
RHE 330E Rhetorical Theory and Analysis  
RHE 379C Topics in Composition

### 6 hours elective (RHE/TLC, E 321, E 360K, E 363, E 364M, E 366K)

### 3 hours RHETORIC internship

RHE 367R Conference Course in Rhetoric and Composition  
RHE 368C Writing Center Internship

### **How would DRC cover courses required by a major?**

A Rhetoric major can be configured to take advantage of current resources. For instance, 6 hours of the major outlined above would be taught by graduate students in regular lower-division Rhetoric classes (RHE 306 & RHE 309). Just as English now currently counts RHE courses toward the English major, a Rhetoric major could use English—and TLC courses—as electives.

The DRC faculty currently includes 11 tenured or tenure-track members, 2 senior lecturers, and 1 specialist. But those numbers are deceptive when it comes to course offerings. Four of the tenured members of the faculty have split appointments with English and four have administrative appointments that reduce or (de facto) eliminate their undergraduate teaching in the DRC. Nonetheless, the DRC currently offers an average of nine upper-division courses every semester.

With appropriate adjustments in teaching assignments, we believe we could offer a Rhetoric major to approximately 100 students by academic year 2005-06. Each student in this proposed major would require 18 upper-division hours, or 5 organized courses and one internship, all taken after the completion of 30 hours.

For planning purposes, we will assume that the average graduation term for these students will be 4 academic years, or 8 long semesters. Subtracting the first year, which will be spent accumulating the 30-hour prerequisite, leaves 6 semesters for each student to take 5 upper-division Rhetoric courses and the internship. So each student in the major would take an average of 1 RHE course per semester. Hence, the DRC would have to teach an additional 100 students in its upper-division curriculum each semester to accommodate 100 majors.

We could accommodate these students by moving all current DRC faculty out of lower-division courses, thereby creating an additional 5 upper-division sections on average each semester. At 20 students per section, this would yield the additional 100 seats needed in upper-division courses per term. Or we could follow the practice of other academic departments and restrict half the seats in all DRC upper-division courses to Rhetoric majors, which would yield about 90 seats.

In brief, we believe that the current DRC faculty could teach 220-250 upper-division students each term by reducing or eliminating lower-division assignments for current DRC faculty. That number would be enough to support a small number of majors initially, given no increase in administrative or teaching responsibilities.

### **What would creating a major in Rhetoric cost?**

Since the initiatives outlined in this proposal will, in fact, increase administrative pressures on the DRC faculty, over time creating a major will likely require additional faculty in Rhetoric and Composition. Further, the major itself will require additional faculty service, especially the internship component, which would likely serve as a keystone course (see Recommendation #6).

While it's impossible to estimate precisely how many additional faculty would be necessary to support all aspects of an enhanced writing program as it develops, new lines would presumably be required over a period of years as the new writing program and major grows.

Creating a major would also require hiring an adviser for the program and finding and equipping an advising office. The current DRC office in Parlin 3, with approximately 820 square feet, already houses 6 people (not counting a work-study student). There is no space for an additional office or staff member.

In brief, offering a major in Rhetoric and Writing would entail a continuing commitment of College resources and faculty energy, as well as a new structure for advising and supporting undergraduates. But these enhancements would parallel developments in the overall College writing program. For example, hiring new faculty with experience in teaching Writing Across the Curriculum would benefit both the new writing program and Rhetoric majors. Further, the undergraduate Rhetoric majors themselves are a potential resource to the program. As noted, many Liberal Arts students already elect to work as consultants in the Undergraduate Writing Center. Through internship courses, they might contribute significantly to enhanced SWC efforts.

## **RECOMMENDATION #6: IMPLEMENT PORTFOLIO OR CAPSTONE PROJECTS THROUGHOUT THE COLLEGE**

While an additional RHE course requirement and enhanced attention to the quality of SWC courses in the College will markedly improve writing instruction, some or all departments in Liberal Arts may wish to document the writing abilities of their students in more individual ways.

The DRC would support initiatives by the College—working through the College Writing Committee, the SWC Coordinator, and the individual departments—to encourage or require capstone or portfolio projects. These capstone activities or courses might be attached to the Essential Writing Courses described in Recommendation #4 or be designed as separate activities in individual departments or majors. Capstone activities might include, for example, a senior thesis, a course in disciplinary research and publication, a portfolio of representative work in a major, or an internship with a strong writing component.

Once again, a single requirement would not reflect the needs of majors as diverse as Philosophy and Economics, Sociology and Women's Studies. The sheer size of some departments and the various paths students take through the College of Liberal Arts also argue for programs varied enough to provide experiences valuable to students and faculty alike. In particular, faculty members will be understandably reluctant to take on the additional work of portfolio programs or capstone projects unless they are personally invested in them and see them as opportunities to ensure that their majors are receiving superior educations in their departments.

### **Rationale for a portfolio program**

Capstone projects already exist in some areas—for example, in the Plan II and honors programs. But for compelling logistical reasons, not all departments or programs currently support a formal, end-of-career writing project. An option for such programs might be a portfolio program that encourages departments to consider the writing goals they have for their majors.

Like other elements of this proposal, the basics of the Liberal Arts Portfolio Program are already in place: Dr. Schorn and Associate Dean of Liberal Arts Linda Ferreira-Buckley have proposed working with 3 departments in fall 2003 to initiate this program. They would undertake the following steps:

- 1) Working with experts on writing evaluation in the DRC and the Undergraduate Writing Center, they will develop a description of the portfolio project for faculty, outlining the benefits of a portfolio system to departments and students.
- 2) They will help faculty from each department to draft a set of departmental writing goals for students in each major. The goals will be used to structure the writing portfolio requirement in a department.
- 3) They will work with faculty to articulate the shape of student portfolios in the separate departments. At this stage, they will draw upon the resources and guidance of the

Undergraduate Writing Center to be certain that the projects are useful to students and manageable for faculty and administrative staff. The portfolio systems are likely to include some or all of the following features:

- The portfolio will include formal statements in which students articulate their goals, both personal and professional.
- The portfolio system will guide students in planning a program of study and help them achieve those goals.
- The portfolio will present work that students have produced for SWC and other writing classes; it will not involve additional major writing projects.
- The portfolio will showcase the students' writing abilities. Special College Honors may be awarded to outstanding portfolios.
- The portfolios will function as a credential of professional writing ability.
- The portfolio program will include an embedded longitudinal assessment plan of student writing.

4) During and after the development stage, the SWC Coordinator, Ferreira-Buckley, and others will conduct workshops and seminars to help instructors implement and fine-tune the portfolio system. Dr. Schorn and Dr. Ferreira-Buckley have designated a working budget from the remaining Houston Endowment funds to support these workshops and to augment them with on-campus visits from nationally recognized experts on writing portfolio assessment.

5) Finally, once the portfolio project is underway, the SWC Coordinator will pursue grant funding for AI positions to serve as liaisons between the Writing Center and the participating departments. These "discipline-attached" consultants would be trained to work especially with writers in the participating disciplines.

This limited effort should provide firsthand information about the feasibility of a more ambitious portfolio program. (For more details, see Appendix C.)

We strongly recommend, however, that the College also bring in one or more outside consultants with experience running large-scale portfolio programs to make recommendations to the College of Liberal Arts. These consultants would truncate our learning curve in setting up and managing any new program and alert us to the pitfalls that have undermined similar efforts elsewhere.

### **What would a portfolio project or capstone projects throughout the College cost?**

At this time, we cannot estimate the costs of a full portfolio or capstone project throughout the College. However, the pilot program of Dean Ferreira-Buckley and Dr. Schorn should provide



initial estimates of the financial, equipment, and personnel needs. We expect costs to be quite high.

For example, the project will require extensive record-keeping and management of the student portfolios. Electronic portfolio software will need to be developed (or appropriate software purchased). Methods will have to be established for collecting materials and guiding students through their portfolio projects. Portfolios will have to be recorded and stored securely, with appropriate access for faculty. Finally, the portfolios will need to be examined and assessed in some fashion by faculty. Each of these steps will require personnel working both with the portfolios themselves (software, recording, storage, access) and with the people involved in their production and assessment.

Costs may be more manageable once routines are established or standards are set for the entire college. A subcommittee of the College Writing Committee might be established to coordinate the portfolio initiatives in individual departments, encouraging departments to share costs by adopting some common technologies, techniques, and administrative structures. Again, a consultant should be able to provide plausible financial estimates for the undertaking.

Capstone courses or projects would have differing costs. Where a capstone course also serves as an essential writing course, two departmental requirements might be merged, with the students in such a class producing a substantive writing project or portfolio reviewed by senior faculty. Again, faculty time would be absorbed by the review and an effort might be made to record the final projects electronically. But combining a portfolio activity with an Essential Writing Course taught in a student's major would be a splendid way of enhancing student writing in the College.

The bottom line is that portfolio or capstone projects offered in the College of Liberal Arts will be a major and expensive undertaking, but one with substantial payoffs if departments see them as necessary experiences for their students.

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## APPENDIX A: CURRENT RHE 309 COURSES AND POSSIBLE ADAPTATIONS

One of the great advantages of focusing a new writing requirement in part on existing RHE 309 courses is their adaptability. The course titles are open-ended and the syllabi flexible enough to serve a wide range of interests and needs. Following is a review of the RHE 309 variants and how they might be adapted to serve students in the College of Liberal Arts.

- **RHE 309S, Critical Thinking and Persuasive Writing.** In this advanced course on argumentation, students receive a more detailed introduction to rhetorical theory and practice than they do in RHE 306. Originally conceived as a sophisticated introduction to writing as a liberal art for students who had placed out of RHE 306, RHE 309S was broadened in scope when it became clear that most of the students enrolling in the class did not match the target profile. Many were communications majors or juniors and seniors from across the university enrolling chiefly to acquire lower-division SWC credit.

We propose restoring this writing course to its original design, making it a lively introduction to writing in the liberal arts, with a focus on public argument and debate and a substantive review of research techniques. The course would be ideal for undeclared Liberal Arts majors who do place out of RHE 306, yet want writing instruction early in their careers.

- **RHE 309K, Topics in Writing.** In this course, students analyze in-depth the rhetorical strategies characteristic of a particular variety of discourse. Recent topics have included the Rhetoric of Autobiography; Rhetoric of the Road; Rhetoric of Consumer Culture; Rhetoric of Dystopia; and Rhetoric of Nature Writing.

At present, “K” is the RHE 309 version most popular with students and instructors alike because of its diversity and innovative topics.

This course offers great potential for adapting the new writing requirement to particular majors in Liberal Arts. We would work with representatives from various large departments to offer a series of repeated or rotating topics appropriate for their students: writing about government; writing about law; writing about economics; writing about psychology. These would not be expert-level or technical writing courses in these fields on the model of the failed E 346, Writing in the Disciplines. Rather, they would provide general introductions to the issues, evidentiary sources, and genres that students will encounter in upper-division work. As the program develops, faculty in the DRC would be designated to coordinate these special topics groups, training and supervising graduate students and/or lecturers assigned to these sections.

Most of the topics courses would be generic, so that a “Writing about American Culture” class might sensibly serve students in Government, Pre-law, History, American Studies, Women’s Studies, or Economics.

We would also, however, explore the possibility of linking some sections of RHE 309K with large enrollment classes in the Liberal Arts—in Anthropology or Psychology, for example—encouraging a significant degree of coordination between the subject matter and writing instruction.

This part of the program would likely require the most intensive coordination and development, but all of its parts need not be in place at the outset of the requirement. In fact, the program would likely evolve as the specific needs of students and departments become apparent. The flexibility of the RHE 309K offering would be one of the strengths of the new program.

- **RHE 309L, The Writing Process.** This is a workshop course aimed at students interested in producing non-fiction prose for the public. Relatively few sections of this course are offered at present. However, the course could become a major component in the new program, an intermediate-level writing course for students who want nuts-and-bolts advice about their writing at any point in their careers.

Less technical than 309K, less rhetorical than 309S, 309L might be the ideal course for Liberal Arts students in Philosophy, English, and Comparative Literature.

- **RHE 309M, Computers and Writing.** This course explores the nature of electronic discourse as well as the uses of technology in producing print-based writing. It currently serves the many students on campus interested in technology and writing, especially those enrolled in the CLA concentration in Technology, Literacy, and Culture. It would retain this focus in the new program.

It is likely that the DRC would explore other course configurations as the new writing program evolves. But given the array of options already on the books, RHE 309 is a significant asset at this point. Versions of all these 309 courses have been taught for the past decade. We thus have a solid foundation from which to launch a new requirement, without the need to surmount administrative barriers involved in creating new courses and new course numbers.

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## **APPENDIX B: TWO ALTERNATIVES FOR ENHANCING WRITING INSTRUCTION**

We have considered but rejected two significant options for improving the writing experiences of student in Liberal Arts. One would involve raising or eliminating the exemption score for RHE 306, in effect requiring all Liberal Arts students to take—not just present credit for—the course. The second option would be to require students to take an upper-division writing course rather than the unspecified RHE class or course in a major field we have recommended. Both of these options have enough merit to require a rationale for their rejection.

### **Why not require all CLA majors to take RHE 306?**

The current RHE 306 “Rhetoric and Composition” course is a true college-level class in argument, a topic usually covered in second-term, first-year writing courses at many other institutions. Requiring all Liberal Arts students to take the class in residence at UT would guarantee that they had a college-level introduction to rhetoric.

But such a requirement might not be perceived as enhancing the quality of the Liberal Arts degree. Since a substantial number of students enter UT with AP credit for 306, with transfer credit for the course from another institution, or with a SAT II test score that earns them credit for 306, requiring 306 may leave many students feeling that they are repeating material they have already mastered. In some cases, they will be correct.

Mandating 306 would also undermine Advanced Placement programs and courses in Texas high schools. Students are motivated to attempt college-level work by the prospect of earning college credit on AP examinations. Removing the incentive for students applying to UT-Austin would make advanced high school curricula in writing less valuable to prospective students. (However, many private schools and some comparable public institutions—Ohio State, for example—do not allow high school AP credit to substitute for a college-level writing course. Most AP courses, it has been argued, teach literary analysis rather than expository writing.)

Moreover, simply requiring all Liberal Arts students to take RHE 306 would not improve the degree experience of Liberal Arts students who currently take RHE 306. For them, the new program would be exactly the same as the current program.

At some point, it might be appropriate to recommend raising the bar for exemption in RHE 306. But the current program serves both students in and outside of the college reasonably well and reaches a manageable number of students. Students in a first-term required course also benefit from a stable syllabus repeated across all sections. More diversity might be desirable, however, in a course requirement specifically designed to serve the College of Liberal Arts.

### **Why not require all CLA majors to take an upper-division writing class?**

There are obvious pedagogical advantages in requiring students to take a writing course fairly late in their academic careers when they have chosen majors and have become more serious about their educational goals and careers. It makes sense to reinforce whatever writing instruction students have received in their first year with additional instruction nearer their point of graduation. Upper-division writing courses can be sophisticated in content and demanding.

However, a 3-hour upper-division writing course requirement poses significant logistical problems. Because it is an upper-division course, few students will either place out of the course or be able to offer transfer credit. Thus, we would have to staff enough sections for every student in the college. In fall 2002 there were approximately 2750 juniors in the College of Liberal Arts and 700 additional transfer students. Assuming that few of the transfer students would have credit for an upper-division writing course, the college would have approximately 3400 students who needed a writing course in the junior year. That works out to approximately 162 new sections (figuring 21 students/section) offered each year by the DRC. In effect, the junior-level course alone would more than double the course offerings of the unit.

The number of total sections taught by the DRC might be reduced in a variety of ways. The number of sections of RHE 309 offered could be scaled back considerably to accommodate the need for the upper-division course. Transfer credit for the upper-division requirement might be assigned generously, and responsibility for teaching the upper-division class might be distributed among several departments. But the prospect of staffing so many new sections is daunting, and the precedents for an upper-division writing class at UT are unfortunate.

To staff a junior-level course, the DRC would have to significantly increase the size of its tenure track faculty or commit to hiring a sizeable pool of Ph.D.-level lecturers or adjunct faculty. (An upper-division course could not appropriately be staffed by graduate students.) A sufficient number of lecturers would, however, likely be available in Austin to cover the increased demand for instructors.

An upper-division writing requirement would also require an adjustment in the degree plan of every major in the college. The additional upper-division course might be perceived by both students and college faculty as an unwarranted imposition or as yet another impediment to timely graduation.

It would also require the creation of a variety of new RHE course numbers since most existing DRC upper-division numbers are more specialized than a junior-level writing requirement should be.

Finally, the failure of E 346 in the mid 1980s has probably dampened the enthusiasm in many departments for another experiment at this level. Reasonable questions were raised at the time about the appropriateness of instructors with degrees primarily in English teaching writing in disciplines far removed from their areas of expertise. While we believe that such objections could be met by an upper-division course focused entirely on the needs of Liberal Arts students, we also believe that such an offering would strain the resources of the College and the DRC beyond the breaking point. It did in fact happen once before.

An unspecified 3-hour writing requirement offers most of the pedagogical advantages of a junior-level requirement and far fewer logistical impediments. Moreover, under this proposal, the number of upper-division writing courses could be substantially increased over time without modifying the original requirement. The unspecified requirement gives the administration, faculty, and students substantially more choices and flexibility.

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## APPENDIX C: LOGISTICS OF A PILOT PORTFOLIO PROGRAM

**Capacity:** No additional courses would need to be added to accommodate the pilot portfolio project in a limited number of departments. Student work would come from existing SWC courses. Some SWC sections might be adjusted to ensure they are requiring work from students that could be used in the portfolio. As the portfolio is designed to be goals-based, such an adjustment would simply bring SWC courses in line with departmental writing goals.

**Staffing requirements:** An additional commitment would be needed from each department in the pilot study to assess portfolios. The commitment here will depend on the size of the department and the complexity of their portfolio design. However, the SWC Coordinator would provide training and support for portfolio evaluators in the pilot program, with assistance from the Writing Center.

**Other costs:** If the portfolios are submitted in electronic form, the costs of storage and retrieval must be considered. Students could be required to submit portfolios on CD or disk, just as they now submit dissertations. But decisions will have to be made about appropriate formats.

**Transition for incoming students:** The project would be “grandfathered,” so that only incoming students in the pilot departments are required to produce portfolios. However, senior students could be encouraged to participate in the portfolio project voluntarily since having a portfolio on record may be a substantial advantage to them. As they are already subject to the SWC requirement, they are producing usable writing anyway, so submitting a portfolio would not impose an undue burden on them.

**High-quality instruction:** By motivating departments to define their writing goals, and by focusing attention on student writing in the major, the portfolio project should improve the quality of writing instruction in existing SWC courses. The portfolio projects will extend the fruits of writing courses, whether SWC or EWC, beyond their typical 45 hours of class time, producing work that becomes part of a permanent document.

However, this pedagogical advantage will be realized only if the college supports SWC instructors and courses adequately. Without the SWC Coordinator as a resource and the Writing Committee overseeing course offerings, the new portfolio requirement might compound the difficulties already posed by the SWC program.

**Flexibility to meet student needs:** Because the portfolio program would be housed within the majors, it should by definition be able to meet the needs of students in those diverse majors.

**Minimal impact on time of degree completion:** The portfolio should not add significantly to the workloads of Liberal Arts students. Since most portfolio material would come from courses either already required or added as part of a new writing requirement, the portfolio program itself would encourage students to take their writing courses more seriously. Students could receive

guidance on assembling their portfolios from the UWC or from departmental “mentors” who meet with them once or twice a semester. The UWC could also conduct Portfolio Workshops each semester, hosted by the AIs from each participating department. All these methods would help students shape their portfolios without taking extra coursework.