EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Academic Program Review
College of Arts and Sciences

DEPARTMENT/PROGRAM
Writing Center

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS
Dr. Julia Bleakney, Stanford University
Dr. Tereza Joy Kramer, St. Mary’s College of California

CAMPUS VISIT
November 11-13, 2015

The review team read the self-study written by the Director of the Writing Center; reviewed the program services; conducted visits; interviewed faculty, students and staff; and met with the Dean, Associate Deans and other relevant members of the campus community. Prior to their visit, the reviewers were provided with USF’s Vision, Mission, Values Statement, the program’s self-study and other university materials.

1. How did the external review committee rate the quality of the program – excellent, very good, good, adequate, or poor? How does the program compare with benchmark top-tier programs nationally? Please provide a brief rationale for the external review committee’s rating.

Overall, the reviewers were impressed with the Writing Center and the service it provides to students. The review team praised the “individualized attention” that students receive from Writing Center staff, commended the “flexibility” of appointments hours and locations, and lauded the “veteran group of preceptors”. The report contains recommendations for improving several aspects of the center. The review team gave the Writing Center a rating of “good”.

2. What are the most important general issues that emerged from the external review process?

- The Writing Center’s mission “to nurture each student’s unique gifts and insights for the purposes of helping them develop their writing skills”, supports “students in achieving their written communication goals”.

- The center is “one of the few resources on campus” that supports “the individual learning around writing and language acquisition” for international studies and English Language Learners not enrolled in the Academic English for Multilingual speakers. As it is currently structured, the Writing Center is not set-up to fully support the needs of English Language Learners not in the Academic English for Multilingual Speaker program.

- The Writing Center is responsive to student needs, which is demonstrated through tutoring services being offered at satellite locations and through a change in policy that allows students to have additional time with writing center preceptors.

- The Writing Center’s practices mirror its theoretical model, Muriel Harris’s model, in some of its operations and veers from the model in others. According to the review team, the Writing Center does offer tutorials “in a one-on-one setting; each student’s individual needs are the focus of the
tutorial”. The center does not follow another section of what Harris’s model calls for – “tutors are coaches ad collaborators, not teachers; writers work on a writing from a variety of courses; and writing centers are available for student at all levels of proficiency”.

3. **What specific recommendations for improving the program’s quality has the external review committee made to the Dean?**

The Review team has provided eight specific recommendations to ensure that the Writing Center continues to “meet the needs of the changing student demographic”.

a. Transition the informal Writing Center Advisory Board into a formal Writing Center Steering Committee.
   - The creation of a university-wide steering committee will “increase campus buy-in with the mission and elevate the WC’s profile”. Additionally, this steering committee will help the writing center to better determine how to serve the English Language Learning population.

b. Develop a more robust assessment plan, tied to student learning outcomes and university priorities
   - An assessment model that integrates a mix of direct and indirect assessment methods will provide additional data about the needs of current students and inform a discussion of how best to meet those needs. The review team suggests “qualitative research that analyzes students texts before and after WC visits..”. The review team suggests bringing in other faculty as partners in gathering data, which will increase “the reliability of the research and also campuswide knowledge of and collaboration with the WC”.
   - The review team also suggests that the Writing Center create student learning outcomes for tutoring sessions that are aligned to the outcomes of the Rhetoric and Language program.

c. Develop a five to ten year strategic plan
   - The Writing Center should prepare a strategic plan that outlines “long term decision regarding program for special populations, resource allocation, training, etc.”.

d. Expand directorship position and reporting
   - The Writing Center Directorship should be increased to 75% time. The review team suggests that the Director teach two courses per year, one of which could be the new writing center training course - if the WC decides to move towards student tutors. According the report, this arrangement allows “the director to providing ongoing training and mentoring to all tutors.”

e. Requiring ongoing staff development training
   - Writing Center faculty preceptors should be required to attend regular, paid trainings that ensure “consistent high quality tutoring”, promote an understanding of writing center pedagogy, and “prepare preceptors to support all students”.
f. Review Team recommends several changes to the tutoring staff structure and the methodology that guides the tutoring staff
   • Shift resources of tutor time and money away from underutilized hours at satellite locations
     The review team recommends that tutors at satellite locations work on an on-call basis. Additionally, the team recommends continuing to utilize faculty as tutors at the satellites because of difficulties in training and supervising students at the satellite locations.
   • Train and hire student tutors
     The review team suggests that tutors could be graduate students in the School of Education who complete a new course in practice and theory or undergraduate students who complete the theory and practice course and successfully complete the hiring process.
   • Ensure session flexibility
     The review team suggests allowing the student clients to determine the length of their appointment. The report states that this arrangement will promote “collaborative conversation” and permit “the writer to proceed at their own pace”.
   • Expand tutoring methodology
     The review team encourages the writing center to offer different types of sessions to student writers with different concerns and needs.

g. Collaborate on Writing in the Disciplines/ Writing Across Curriculum
   • The review team recommends that the writing center become a “leader and active contributor in campuswide planning and assessment for writing in the disciplines”.
   • Additionally, the team suggests that the Writing Center partner with the Center for Teaching Excellence on writing retreats and faculty development workshops.
   • Finally, the team suggests collaboration with the Center for Instructional Technology to provide support in writing pedagogy and promote innovations in technology.

h. Combining service to reach all writers, all communicators, across campus
   • The review team recommends that the directors of the Writing Center and Learning Center work collaboratively to determine the future partnership between these centers. Specifically, the directors should address how to differentiate their resources, combine tutors who provide similar services and the possibility of developing cross training for tutors and consultants.
   • The review team suggests that combining the Writing Center and Speaking Centers could provide “multilayered opportunities” for “cross-training, collaboration, and co-informing for writers who walk-in and the tutors”.
   • The review team recommends considering combining the Writing Center and English Language Learner Services to better meet the needs of the ELL population at the university.
4. **In the opinion of the external review committee, is the program following the University’s strategic initiatives?**

   According to the review team, the Writing Center’s mission to enhance and develop “each student’s unique gifts and insights for the purpose of helping them develop their writing skills” directly support the university’s mission to “recognize the value of individualized attention to the needs of others”.

5. **In what way is the program contributing to the goal of making the University of San Francisco a premier Jesuit, Catholic urban university with a global perspective that educates leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world?**

   University of San Francisco students who visit the Writing Center receive “focused attention”, which fulfills the center’s mission of creating “a safe learning environment, outside of the regular classroom, to engage students as writers, to help students understand their ideas, and to better articulate those ideas to their audience”. The Writing Center’s pedagogy is summarized by Muriel Harris, whose model forms the basis of the Writing Center tutoring program, “tutorials are offered in a one-on-one setting; each student’s individual needs are the focus of the tutorial”.

6. **What is the timetable for the response to the external review committee’s recommendations for program improvement? What can the Office of the Provost do to appropriately respond to the review?**

   The next step is for the Dean and Associate Deans to meet with the Writing Center Director and discuss the action plan based on the self-study and reviewers’ report. Based on the reviewer’s suggestions, the Office of the Provost could assist the program by supporting: increased collaboration with academic departments throughout the university decided by the Deans and Director.

7. **What general comments or issues, if any, are crucial to understanding the reviewers report?**

   No additional information is necessary to understand the report.