One-Time Funding Proposal:

Faculty Expectation Survey and Redesign of Basic Writing Curriculum

**Initiator:** Margaret Rustick, Composition Coordinator, and Michael Rovasio, Director of Basic Writing, English Department

**Total Funds Requested:** $25,000

- Database creation = $1,500
- Materials for students and for faculty survey = $3,000
- Portfolio readers = $1,500
- Course release for two 800-level teachers involved in the project = $8,000
- Release time for Director of Basic Writing to conduct and analyze the faculty-expectations survey, redesign curriculum on the basis of results = $10,000

**Brief Description:**

In order to reduce the cost of remedial writing instruction and align curriculum with faculty expectations, we propose to design a "hybrid" basic writing course for students who place into the three-quarter composition sequence (English 801, 802, and 803). Approximately one-third of our incoming freshmen enter at this level, and effectively meeting their needs is a costly undertaking. In this pilot program, we will create a hybrid course to implement in two sections of basic writing. We will also replicate the study done in 1996-7 (RSCA II Grant) in order to clarify faculty expectations vis-à-vis student composition skills. On the basis of the results, Mike Rovasio, director of basic writing, will undertake a revision of the basic writing curriculum in spring 2011, which may include recommendations for reducing instruction time and implementing software.

**Expected Outcomes:**

In research we conducted last year using an online diagnostic version of the English Placement Test (EPT), we discovered wide variations in students' abilities in the ten subsets of skills assessed by the test. The results of this study help explain why teaching basic writing is so difficult. The problem is not that students are uniformly low in all skills, but that their strengths and weaknesses are so diverse. Consequently, basic writing teachers often individualize instruction, which is what our teachers did when they had 12-15 students per section. That approach was highly successful, with 90% of our freshmen fully remediated in one year and our native freshmen outperforming transfer students on the WST. But our success rate has fallen as class sizes have doubled, and we must redesign our basic writing to reflect the realities of the current budget. To that end, we will pilot a hybrid composition class, including one weekly class meeting with an instructor combined with an online program targeting specific skills identified in students' diagnostic test results. In addition, we will collect information from across the campus to align curriculum with student needs and faculty expectations.
Strategic Impact:

The current cost for basic writing is in excess of $300,000 per year. Implementing a hybrid model could reduce that cost substantially. Furthermore, data from the faculty survey will help us better prepare students with the writing skills faculty expect. If our basic writers are better prepared to meet those expectations, faculty across the campus may be more inclined to assign writing, providing students with more opportunities to practice and develop skills necessary to satisfy the University Writing Skills Requirement and to graduate without having to take additional composition courses.

Timeline:

Fall 2010--Curriculum design will begin to develop the hybrid course. Faculty survey will be developed and data base will be created to collect information.

Winter 2011--Four sections of English 801 (approximately 100 students) will be participate in the study. Progress will be assessed through a portfolio collected at the end of winter quarter. Faculty survey administered.

Spring 2011--Analysis of data and redesign of basic writing curriculum.

Potential Barriers:

In order for this program to be successful, the hybrid course must be carefully designed to meet students' needs. As developmental readers and writers, the target student population may have difficulties working in the online environment, which is why we have opted for a hybrid course rather than a complete online version of basic writing. We believe regular face-to-face contact with a faculty member will be essential to monitoring student difficulties in the online environment. Additionally, expanding this program to include more basic writing courses will require training of composition faculty, as not all teachers are equally competent in online instruction. Regardless of the success of the online component of our proposal, we believe the faculty survey and close examination of the basic writing curriculum will allow us to improve the quality of instruction, thereby increasing student success in subsequent courses, as well as on the Writing Skills Test.