**One-Time Funding Proposal: Writing Skills Test Intervention**

**Initiator:** Margaret Rustick, English Department

**Total Funds Requested:** $21,000.

$5,000 for one course "buy out" of Composition Coordinator to act as program administrator, overseeing student recruitment, curriculum development, data analysis, and, if the pilot is successful, marketing through College of Extended Learning. $16,000 for two adjunct composition instructors ($8,000 each) to develop curriculum beginning Summer 2010 and instruct students Fall 2010 and Winter 2011.

**Brief Description:**

The goal of this program is to increase students' chances of passing the university Writing Skills Test (WST), thereby decreasing the demand for subsequent courses that are both costly to the university and can potentially delay students' graduation. Composition faculty will work to develop and deliver instruction for students who have failed the WST. If the pilot program is successful, these preparation courses could be offered through the College of Extended Learning at minimal cost to students. While initial efforts will focus on students who have already taken the WST, it may be possible to extend this program in the future, making it available to students before they attempt the exam.

**Expected Outcomes:**

Approximately 3,500 students take the WST each year, with an average pass rate of less than 60%. Of the estimated 1400 students annually who do not pass the WST, about 300 students have failed the exam more than once. Meeting the needs of students who have failed the WST costs a minimum of $200,000 each year, about one quarter of which is spent for students who have failed the WST more than once and who have no option but to take classes. Although the Student Center for Academic Achievement offers workshops providing general advice, the university currently has no instructional support specifically intended for students preparing to take the WST. While EO 802 appears to prevent us from offering existing composition classes through Extension, it does not prohibit the proposed exam preparation course.

**Strategic Impact:**

We have not attempted anything like this before; therefore, it is difficult to predict the rate of success. However, since the goal is to offer this course through the College of Extended Learning, it will be a one-time university expenditure aimed at reducing a significant ongoing demand on our limited funds. If we are able to reduce the demand for composition courses that satisfy the University Writing Skills Requirement (UWSR) by 10%, we will recoup the cost of this project. Furthermore, since passing the USWR is a graduation requirement, students who have failed the WST twice are now prevented from graduating until they take a designated course. Currently, the lack of funds for offering those courses...
has created an impasse, and approximately 300 students were waitlisted this quarter, unable to enroll in the course necessary for their graduation. Increasing pass rates on the WST, which this proposal is designed to do, is therefore essential to improving graduation rates.

Timeline:

Summer 2010--identify and contact students who have failed the WST to recruit student participants; develop curriculum

Fall 2010--continue recruiting students; deliver curriculum to first round of students; collect data from students who retake the WST; modify curriculum as needed

Winter 2011--deliver curriculum to second round of students; collect data from students who retest

Spring 2011--prepare a final report on all collected data and, if successful, develop marketing and outreach campaign

Potential Barriers:

If the program is successful, students in the future will have to pay for this test preparation course through the College of Extended Learning, and we will need to be sure the cost is not so high as to discourage students from taking the course. While the curriculum will be designed to target specific skills, another substantial concern is how quickly we can improve those skills, particularly vocabulary and grammar of nonnative speakers who make up a substantial portion of this population. We believe we can meet the needs of some students and increase their pass rates, but clearly there are other students who will require more extensive instruction than this program is intended to deliver. Determining which students will benefit most from this kind of course and making that information clear to students will be a challenge.