TO: DWR Faculty

FROM: Strategic Planning Task Force

DATE: November 9, 2017

SUBJECT: Strategic Planning Fall 2017 Progress Report

In Fall 2017, a task force was created to study the department, collect information from faculty, and eventually develop a strategic plan for the DWR. This progress report summarizes the task force’s work as of November 9, 2017.

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Process Overview

Timeline and Methods

**11 Sep 2017:** Questionnaire sent to all individuals in DWR as Google Form

**19 Sep 2017:** Deadline postponed to encourage more responses from individuals

**25 Sep 2017:** 37 individual responses received; form closed

**25 Sep 2017:** Questionnaire sent to all standing committees and teaching circles

**31 Oct 2017:** Questionnaire for committees and teaching circles closed.

Over the past few months, the DWR SP Taskforce members met every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon for one-hour meetings. Ten meetings were held prior to Nov 8, 2017.

Meetings were open to all interested departmental members. DWR members attending the meetings included: Sheena Boran, Brad Campbell, Bob Cummings, Andrew Davis, Karen Forgette, Ashley Jones-Bodie, Joanne Mitchell, Alice Myatt, Chad Russell, Glenn Schove, Colleen Thorndike, and Sarah Wilson.
During the first week, the Taskforce discussed and revised the timeline for the Sensemaking stage of the overall process and how this work would be used by the department moving forward after December 1.

Major discussion focused on the process for gathering departmental members’ input on mission, vision, and departmental concerns and focus. During the first week, 25% of departmental members had responded to the individual survey. The Taskforce extended the deadline and asked Glenn Schove to make a personal, e-mail request to increase the number of members responding. After the extended deadline, 37 total individual survey responses were received.

To prepare the individual responses for review, Joanne Mitchell and Chad Russell compiled the individual responses into a report with anonymous responses organized by survey questions. The summary document of survey responses totaled approximately 28 pages of content for the 11 question items covering mission, vision, issues, and strengths.

In addition to sending out an individual survey to departmental members, the Taskforce asked departmental groups to also respond to survey questions, functioning as informal focus groups. The groups included the teaching circles, the curriculum committees, the writing centers. Groups leaders were able to determine their own process for recording the group’s responses and submitting those responses to the Taskforce. Group feedback was submitted throughout the month of October. Responses from the groups were compiled into a summary document, organized by survey question. The document totaled approximately 15 pages of content.

To review and create a preliminary synthesis of the individual survey responses, the group spent multiple meetings working in pairs around the room examining individual questions for themes in the answers. Then, the pairs shared their findings with the full group and discussion focused on confirming the lists of findings as representative of the spirit and content of the individual responses. In following meetings, the group members prepared individual mission and vision statements and worked to combine them into draft mission and vision statements that reflected the focus and spirit of the survey responses. Then, Taskforce members read the compiled group responses and brought suggested changes to the draft mission and vision statements to a following meeting. The group determined that a shared progress report of the findings should be created. Bob Cummings created a synthesis of departmental issues and strengths which was reviewed by the Taskforce to confirm it reflected the spirit and content of those survey responses.

In addition to work on the departmental survey, the Taskforce spent multiple meetings reviewing proposed, basic departmental bylaws. The group read through each item included in the draft bylaws, debated individual policy statements and the merits of including each in the basic bylaws. The group’s goal was to create a basic document that could serve as an accurate reflection of current departmental practice. Any policies that
seemed divisive to the group or warranted more time in discussion were moved to the appendix of the document.

### Mission and Vision Surveys

The task force distributed sets of questions to individual stakeholders in the department, as well as to committees and other small groups. These questions addressed the DWR’s mission and vision. The task force has used faculty feedback from these surveys to draft mission and vision statements.

#### Mission

- What is our fundamental purpose? Why do we exist? What needs do we meet?
- What are we doing to meet those needs?
- Whom do we serve?
- What philosophies or points of view do we espouse in meeting our purpose?
- How do we fit within the University (or larger context, such as discipline, state, higher education, etc.) to fulfill our purpose?
- What are the major activities in which we engage to carry out our mission?
- What makes us unique -- what separates our mission from others?

#### Vision

- What is your dream for our community (you can define community)? What would you like to see change?
- What do you see as the community's major issue or problems?
- What do you see as the community's major strengths and assets?
- What kind of community do we want to create?

### Summary of the Answers

#### Answers to Questions on Mission

**Q (Mission) What is our fundamental purpose? Why do we exist? What needs do we meet?**

- To teach students to think, write, and speak effectively (alt. = effectively communicate)
- To serve undergraduate students within the general education curriculum
- Within and beyond the college setting

**Q (Mission) What are we doing to meet those needs?**

- Teaching: Inquiry based assignments and critical thinking skills; communication skills
- Support: Personalized learning and engagement (one-on-one interaction with students); Writing Centers
- Administration: Core curriculum that is more uniform than not; committees and shared governance on a department level
Q (Mission) Whom do we serve?
- our students
- the university as a community of scholars
- the larger community of MS and beyond

Q (Mission) What philosophies or points of view do we espouse in meeting our purpose?
- Student-centered instruction
- Critical Thinking
- Civil engagement in public discourse

Q (Mission) How do we fit within the University (or larger context, such as discipline, state, higher education, etc.) to fulfill our purpose?
- provide Gen ed basic competency
- provide transferable skills to other disciplines
- provide skills beyond academia (e.g., Major & Minor)

Q (Mission) What are the major activities in which we engage to carry out our mission?
- student-centered teaching
- student-centered support
- FYC and gen. ed curriculum requirements

Q (Mission) What makes us unique -- what separates our mission from others?
- Accessible
- Personalized
- Transferable

Answers to Questions on Vision

Q (Vision) What is your dream for our community (you can define community)? What would you like to see change?

When the community was the faculty and the department, we should:
- be inclusive
- collaborate more purposefully between speech and writing faculty
- foster a deeper connection to rhetoric and communication
- build a community which is open minded and responds to differing ideas through respect
- renew our attention on first year writing with strategic innovation informed by sound reasoning, research, and input from those involved/directly affected by the choices we make

When the community the faculty and the department with students, we should:
- Offer a robust writing studies major
- Teach and embrace the creed
- Offer fewer online first-year writing courses
- Foster diversity of opinion
Q (Vision) What do you see as the community’s major issue or problems?

- Tensions between first-year courses and upper-division courses: have we lost our focus with the development of a minor and major?
- Tensions between instructional faculty and research faculty: can we keep a healthy and collegial atmosphere while balancing these cultures?
- Lack of diversity among our faculty
- Anxiety over the future and a new chair
- Failure to involve all faculty in projects, pilots, and programs, with sudden announcements, e.g., commonplace book, Lumen Waymaker, SGID
- Lack of respect
- Lack of integration of speech communication into department
- Lack of collaboration between full-time and part-time faculty
- Making decisions about curriculum and major based on who is around the table, rather than a clear and thoughtful process
- Lack of participation in University faculty governance
- Failure to understand that half of our students come from outside Mississippi, and a tendency to teach to Mississippians
- Bullying of dissentsers
- Too many internal hires
- Lack of repercussions for poor teaching
- Unhealthy absence of communication
- Growing bureaucracy and inability to get things done

Q (Vision) What do you see as the community’s major strengths and assets?

- Dedicated, talented, hard-working faculty
- Dedicated, talented, hard-working staff (Glenn, Joanne, and Andrew were mentioned several times in different ways)
- Diversity of faculty
- Willingness of faculty to share knowledge, experience, and resources
- Positive and collaborative culture
- Shared dedication to students
- University culture appreciates our work

Q (Vision) What responses did we receive?

Q (Vision) What kind of community do we want to create? One which . . .

- Values input from all people
- Is open and based on sharing and mutual respect
- Is inclusive
- Is diverse
- Is student-centered
- Some preliminary deliverables
Draft Mission and Vision Statements

Draft Mission Statement

The Department of Writing and Rhetoric provides student-centered, inquiry-based instruction and support to advance the skills of effective, responsible thinking, speaking, and writing within and beyond the university setting.

Draft Vision Statement

The Department of Writing and Rhetoric leads the University in creating and sustaining a diverse, inclusive culture of effective writers and speakers.