

Quality Enhancement Plan: Academic Fitness

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Quality Enhancement Plan: Academic Fitness
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Section 1: Goals:

- **Specify the goals for the QEP you have designed.**

This is a proposal for a university-wide commitment to academic fitness, an expansion of our notion of transformational learning to embrace the deliberate transformation of every student who comes to us into a highly skilled learner, fit by the possession of a core set of essential academic skills for success in virtually any career. Mastery of this short list of portable, flexible, infinitely useful higher order skills—academic fitness—can equip our students to meet the intellectual challenges of any discipline. Academic fitness can empower our students for success in the workplace, where advancement is often tied to facility for learning. The possession of this complex of keystone skills can fit UNF graduates, lifelong, to thrive in the face of change.

The keys to academic fitness are three capacities interrelated and mutually reinforcing: skill in critical thinking; fluency in information management; and power in wielding language, both written and spoken. These capacities in combination enable research and reasoned argument. They fit students for productive participation in public and academic discourse. To the degree that our students equip themselves with this complex of skills, they will move toward fitness for academic independence and authority.

We can engage students as soon as they enter the university in informed public discourse, the practice of reasoned argument as the means to effect change. We can engage them at once in academic discourse as part of an extended learning community. We can move to make academic fitness an emphasis at every level, and across the disciplines. We can make challenges to academic fitness constant throughout our undergraduate curriculum—and by this means make our curriculum university-wide coherent in a new way. We can by degrees make easier the success of all our teachers as well as all our students, as these will move forward increasingly fit for academic challenge. We can keep the promise made by Academic Learning Compacts in every major at UNF: that a UNF education is marked by skills in scholarship and language. We can, by making a commitment to academic fitness, enhance the reputation of the university. We can focus our efforts in a way that will speak directly to the practical concerns of the state Board of Governors and the university Board of Trustees, the parents and the community and the students themselves. We can make academic fitness the watermark of a UNF education. We can increase the value of a UNF degree.

- **Make clear how these goals relate to the university's mission.**

The university's mission statement declares that the "University of North Florida's primary focus is on instruction, informed by scholarly activity and a commitment to community involvement." A university-wide commitment to academic fitness, beginning with a freshman challenge focused directly on informed public discourse in pursuit of positive community change, would address the university's mission at its heart. This effort would from the beginning mark every

student's experience at UNF with instruction and challenge focused on the development of individual capacities powerful for learning.

The embrace of academic fitness would be consistent in every regard with the university's representation (at www.unf.edu) of its mission and purpose. The university presents its mission as shaped by four "guiding principles," commitments to excellence, focus, relevance, and accountability. Academic fitness, itself the product of excellence in education, is foundational to excellence in intellectual achievement: it reflects, enacts, and enables excellence. The campus-wide pursuit of academic fitness would focus the university's energy and resources on the achievement of outcomes of very high value, fitting our students with particular capacities for success. The complex of interrelated skills comprising academic fitness is flexible and portable; it will prove relevant to the success of every student's career at college and beyond. These skills in productive learning—in critical thinking, in information fluency, in the deployment of language, both written and spoken—will distinguish UNF graduates as fit to contribute to the community in needful and constructive ways. This fitness to contribute, too, makes direct address to the university's mission: the university "acknowledges that the social, cultural, economic, and civic development of Northeast Florida and the state are linked to the development of this institution"—and a commitment to academic fitness can enact our determination to make our provision relevant, to be of use. We can make ourselves accountable, in this effort, for our investment and our effect: we can measure, and learn from our measurements how to accelerate, our students' approach to academic fitness. All four of UNF's "guiding principles," then—excellence, focus, relevance, and accountability—apply.

Where our university's mission is elaborated in greater detail, it is specified that "The university's focus on student instruction requires students to engage in learning experiences which a) foster critical thinking, thoughtful decision making, and effective communication; b) build strong general and disciplinary/professional knowledge bases; and c) engender integrity, ethical development, a global perspective, and a sense of civic responsibility." To an extraordinary degree, this focus is in conformation with a university-wide commitment to academic fitness. The skills specified in "a)" are precisely those characteristic of academic fitness. The knowledge bases called for in "b)" include academic fitness capacities in information fluency specific to each discipline. The valorization of integrity and civic responsibility in "c)" is consonant with the goals of ethical reasoned argument—skill in which is arguably both the proof and the point of academic fitness. The effort to develop academic fitness in all our students would underscore and actuate the university's representation of its hoped-for best self.

"The University's focus on building strong academic programs reflects the fact that the value of a student's experience at the University of North Florida must be greater than the sum of the individual courses that the student completes": a university-wide commitment to academic fitness would position individual courses as part of a coherent effort encompassing not only a deep and generous understanding of one discipline, but also full possession of the capacities characteristic of an authentic university education.

Finally, the university declares its "academic programs must prepare students who are well-grounded in their academic specialty, capable of meeting the demands of their professional and

societal responsibilities, and able to adapt to the changing global environment”: again, here, fitness for learning is fitness to succeed, fitness to respond in the best way to change. We can move here to provide our students the capacities to meet the challenges to their understanding in scholarship, in the workplace, and in the world.

- **Be precise about the connection between these goals and student learning outcomes (which are to be elaborated in Section 3.)**

Our students’ facility for learning in every discipline is a function of their academic fitness. The better developed their abilities in critical thinking, in the evaluation and right deployment of evidence, and in informed, precise communication, the easier will be their mastery of any field of learning. The core set of learning outcomes evidencing academic fitness—again: skill in critical thinking; fluency in information management; and power in wielding language, both written and spoken—are together manifest in strength in reasoned argument, the process by which learning advances. The three capacities key to academic fitness are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Information fluency--the ability to find, evaluate, synthesize, and put to conscientious, effective use information on any topic—is dependent, at every level beyond the basic, on critical thinking. Both critical thinking and information fluency are foundational to reasoned argument. These capacities in concert empower scholarship in any field.

The higher order skills of academic fitness can only be developed in challenge, over time. Added throughout our curriculum, challenges simultaneously building to this complex of skills can make our students increasingly fit for personal and professional success.

Section 2: Benefits and Broad Based Involvement:

- **Specify the benefits your design will secure for the university and its students.**

The goals of this proposal are all benefits to the university, its teachers and its students. A university-wide commitment to academic fitness can add productive coherence to our undergraduate curriculum; facilitate academic pursuits within and across the disciplines; help teachers as well as students succeed, by sending students forward increasingly fit for higher level learning; and serve the university’s mission: it can provide excellent instruction focused on the development of a complex of keystone skills relevant everywhere—and essential for success in the world of ideas. Moreover, this focused commitment can equip our students for achievement in challenging careers; add value in the marketplace to a UNF degree; add both advantage and distinction to the UNF undergraduate experience, and lend truth to our claim that there is “no place like this.”

To these benefits must be added at least one more, of considerable importance: a commitment to academic fitness now can provide UNF students an advantage they need. Evidence from many sources suggests the challenge at the lower division—the challenge of building academic fitness fully adequate to higher-level study across the disciplines—is growing steeper, not just at UNF, but nationwide.

ACT, one of the two sister giants of American academic testing, reports that a dauntingly high number of college-bound high school seniors are simply “not ready for college and workplace reading” (“Reading Between the Lines” 1). ACT conclusions are based on data broadly collected over decades: ACT has been measuring the academic achievement of American high school seniors since 1959; since 1985, ACT has also been measuring students’ readiness to take on college level work. ACT results for 2005 compassed the efforts of 40% of America’s graduating seniors nationwide (“Reading Between” 29).

The 2006 ACT report focused on these results notes starkly that “only 51 percent of 2005 ACT-tested high school graduates are ready for college-level reading.” (ACT defines “readiness” as the ability without remediation “to handle the reading requirements for typical credit-bearing first-year college coursework”; the 2006 report finds college reading readiness in only about half the students tested.)

Many students who failed to reach the ACT “benchmark score” for college reading readiness also failed to reach the readiness benchmark score for English. (ACT has established readiness benchmark scores in reading, math, science, and English—“readiness” defined as “the level of proficiency necessary to ensure that [high school graduates] are ready to succeed in college without remediation.” The American School Board Journal in October, 2006, reported that of the millions of students ACT tested in 2006, only 21% met or exceeded the benchmark scores in all four areas.)

A focus on academic fitness can help because the difficulty is not with our students’ potential, but with their experience, with the misalignment between their high school experience and the expectations they face in college. They have found it fully possible to succeed in high school, to win grades and test scores high enough to win their admission into college, and yet many of them have had little opportunity to develop the capacities that mark academic fitness.

David T. Conley, in “The Challenge of College Readiness,” reports that “About 67% of the students who graduated from high school in 2004 went on to enroll in college—a higher proportion than in any previous year”—but he follows this news with the sobering observation that between the number getting into college and the number coming out with degrees, there yawns a considerable separation. Looking back from 2006, he finds only “about 35 percent of students who entered four year colleges seeking a bachelor’s degree in 1998 had earned their degree four years later, and only 56% had graduated six years later” (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, Whitmore). Conley identifies as “one of the major reasons that students falter in college,” “the gap between their high school experiences and college expectations” (23).

The freshest news from ACT—the 2007 report, “Rigor at Risk”—has it that successful completion of all the core classes in a pre-college curriculum does not evidence possession of the capacities that mark academic fitness, or readiness to succeed in college: “At a time when it is becoming more important for U.S. workers to compete internationally, our high school graduates are in danger of entering college or the workforce without sufficient academic preparation. ACT’s national college readiness indicators, the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks, show that *three out of four ACT-tested 2006 high school graduates who take a core curriculum are not prepared to take credit-bearing entry-level college courses with a reasonable chance of*

succeeding in those courses” (italics mine). The portion of ACT-tested high school seniors who met all four college readiness benchmarks rose in 2006 to 23%—leaving 77% less than ready for college in at least one important regard (“Rigor” 2).

The measures of success in high school do not evidence readiness for college. The American Diploma Project was called into being at the 2005 National Education Summit on High Schools to take “aggressive action” in the face of the fact that “our schools are not adequately preparing students for college and 21st-century jobs” (Kraman 3).

Finding that “In every state today, students can meet the requirements for high school graduation and still be unprepared for success in college or the workplace,” ADP set out “to restore value to the high school diploma” by raising standards and aligning “high school graduation tests and requirements [with] the expectations of colleges and employers.” ADP, now an alliance of educational systems in 29 ADP network states, together responsible in 2006 for the education of 60% of America’s public school students, reports considerable and varied progress in its efforts to close “the preparation gap”: no fewer than 44 states have planned or underway efforts to improve the readiness of high school graduates for college and careers. For all this positive movement, however, according to “Closing the Expectations Gap 2007,” ADP’s “Annual 50-State Progress Report of the Alignment of High School Policies with the Demands of College and Work,” high school standards are presently “aligned with postsecondary expectations” in only 12 of 50 states (Kraman 5). (Florida is not among the 12, and not among the 29 ADP network states committed to achieving such alignment.)

The Center for Educational Policy Research reports in “Understanding University Success,” that “Even the best, brightest and most diligent high school students who easily meet admission requirements may find themselves struggling in entry-level courses. They may be eligible for admission and still not be prepared to succeed.” Why? “It is not enough simply to know something; the learner must possess the ability to do something with that knowledge, whether it is to solve a problem, reach a conclusion or present a point of view. This plexus of content knowledge and cognitive skills is what an education at an American research university (and many other institutions of higher education) seeks to develop” (8, 9). This is not work for which our high schools are effectively preparing our students. David Conley, in “The Challenge of College Readiness,” cites multiple studies documenting that the expectations in college courses are “fundamentally different” from those students face in high school: “College instructors expect students to draw inferences, interpret results, analyze conflicting source documents, support arguments with evidence, solve complex problems that have no obvious answer, draw conclusions, offer explanations, conduct research, and generally think deeply about what they are taught”—while high school students “often complete prescribed tasks that require little cognitive engagement”: it is not so for all, of course, but for many high school students, “learning has been reduced to a form of sleepwalking, requiring no deep mastery or understanding” (Conley 23).

Neither does high school equip students with information fluency adequate to success in college. The Educational Testing Service (ETS) reports that “while students may be tech savvy when it comes to entertainment, they may not have the critical thinking skills to perform the kinds of information management and research tasks necessary for academic success” (Katz 35). The

ETS ITC (Information and Communication Technology) Assessment was designed to test “literacy skills expected for college-level work”: the 6,300 students at 63 different institutions who completed the assessment in 2006 earned on average only about 50% (Katz 36).

All this is to say that by making a commitment to academic fitness, the university can move to bridge the gap between our students’ preparation and the challenges of higher level study. In this direction lies benefit for every learning enterprise at UNF.

- **Make clear how the implementation of your design will involve multiple university constituencies.**

At the lower division, a new one-credit Freshman Challenge course would engage every FTIC at UNF—and involve dozens of teachers, specialists in writing and in speech.

All UNF’s 3000-level students would receive direct instruction in writing and be offered multiple challenges building to academic fitness.

Three-thousand-level University Scholarship courses, in versions customized to the disciplines, would be taught in partnership between library personnel and faculty from across the curriculum. Also at the upper division, the design of new courses, and revision of existing courses, to add challenges to academic fitness would offer opportunities to faculty in every major.

Library information specialists would be to a considerable degree more involved in direct instruction, teaching in partnership in 3000 level University Scholarship classes and increasing their (already active and effective) program of library instruction by arrangement, customized occasional whole-class instruction timed to students’ learning needs.

An emissary program—deploying specialists to deliver focused writing instruction on demand, in courses across the disciplines—would carry challenges to academic fitness, and help in meeting them, into any classroom at UNF.

ACE would employ additional tutors, including English graduate students highly expert in writing. It would add tutors trained and skilled in helping students for whom English is a second language. It would offer more workshops, among these fitness workshops on the move, delivered at the dorms.

River House (UNF’s virtual writer’s house) would host the Freshman Challenge Online.

Section 3: Student Learning

- **Identify the importance of your design to student learning.**

I have spoken both to the importance of meeting—and bridging—the gap in freshman readiness, and to the importance of academic fitness as foundational to all higher level learning. It is essential to remember, however, that the core skills characteristic of academic fitness are not

“basic” or “introductory,” but central to learning at every level; they compass every plane of Bloom’s taxonomy, including intellectual processes of the highest order.

The three capacities that interknit in academic fitness—skill in critical thinking; fluency in information management; and power in wielding language, both written and spoken--all have to do with “the ability to synthesize information, personal experience and logic to create knowledge” (Albitz 98). Academic fitness is fitness to create knowledge.

More than half a century ago, what is sometimes referred to as “the Harvard report”—General Education in a Free Society: Report of the Harvard Committee, written in 1945—speaking to “the objectives of a General Education,” defined as central among these, “effective thinking”: thinking marked by the capacities to “communicate, make relevant judgments and discriminate among values” (Albitz 98). These are the capacities intrinsic to academic fitness.

In the decades since the publication of the Harvard report, these learning goals, variously expressed, have pervaded the literature on critical thinking; they are echoed repeatedly in the literature on information fluency. A division of the American Library Association, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), defines information literacy as an individual’s capacity “to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information” (Albitz 99): this is to say, it defines information literacy as involving both critical thinking and communication.

The ACRL is in alignment with the Harvard report in regarding the development of sophisticated learning skills—academic fitness--as central to general education, “the basis for life-long learning,” and indeed requisite to learning in “all disciplines, all environments, and all levels of education” (ACRL 2).

It has been noted that information fluency, in application, presents students intellectual challenges on every level, from the least exacting—the possession of information—up through “higher order” demands in analysis and synthesis, and on to evaluation, requiring, in Benjamin Bloom’s map of the “cognitive domain,” the most sophisticated capacity for abstract thinking (Scales, Matthews, Johnson 235).

The elements of academic fitness are interconnected and mutually reinforcing: not all critical thinking involves information fluency, but all information fluency beyond the basic level requires critical thinking--and information fluency in application demands effective communication.

If we turn from the literature on information fluency to that on critical thinking, we encounter a telling overlap in terms. Robert Ennis, whose work on critical thinking has shaped the field, in 2002 revised his long-famous identification of “critical thinking dispositions and abilities,” and in 2004 produced the latest revision of this list in the terse and unelaborated “Super Streamlined Conception of Critical Thinking.” Ennis’ “short list” will make clear the degree to which all three capacities essential to academic fitness are interknit:

Assuming that critical thinking is reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what

to believe or do, a critical thinker

- is open-minded and mindful of alternatives;
- tries to be well-informed;
- judges well the credibility of sources;
- identifies conclusions, reasons, and assumptions;
- judges well the quality of an argument, including the acceptability of its reasons, assumptions, and evidence;
- can well develop and defend a reasonable position;
- asks appropriate clarifying questions;
- formulates plausible hypotheses; plans experiments well;
- defines terms in a way appropriate for the context;
- draws conclusions when warranted, but with caution;
- integrates all items in this list when deciding what to believe or do.

The critical thinker by Ennis' definition is fluent in information management and skilled in communication. He (or she) is possessed of academic fitness.

If we turn from definitions of critical thinking to a study in freshman readiness, "Understanding University Success," produced by the Center for Educational Policy Research, we find specified as essential for success in "English" evolved capacities in reading and comprehension, writing, research, and critical thinking. If there is always question where these skills "belong," and whose job—in high school, in college—they are to teach—whether they are the "business" of writing specialists, library experts, or faculty in the disciplines--there is no question of their essential importance for success in every field. There is no question our students at present are not on arrival as strong as they might be, and not as well fit for academic success.

▪ **Specify the student learning outcomes your design will enable.**

A commitment to academic fitness will focus on three learning outcomes: skill in critical thinking; fluency in information management; and power in wielding language, both written and spoken. Each of these outcomes can be parsed into (often interrelated and overlapping) component skills: Successful critical thinkers, according to the CEPR standards for success in English, will be able to "reflect on and assess the strengths and weaknesses of their ideas and the expression of those ideas" (27). Successful researchers will be able to "identify claims in their writing that require outside support or verification" (26). Successful writers will be able to "use appropriate strategies to write expository essays that employ supporting evidence; use information from primary and secondary sources; research and organize what is known about the topic" and "use research to support and develop their own opinions" (26). Challenges to academic fitness can be designed to help students employ and develop these keystone capacities in concert.

▪ **Make clear precisely how your design will support student learning.**

We can advance academic fitness by multiple means:

(1) Add a one-hour Freshman Challenge class for every FTIC—a speaking intensive course designed to offer challenges to academic fitness and evidences of its value from the moment of

our students' first arrival on campus. Each incoming freshman class would face fresh challenges, always of two kinds:

- a challenge in academic discourse, focused on learning and teaching;
- a challenge in public discourse, focused on effecting positive change.

The Freshman Challenge would have these goals:

- to engage students immediately in the practice of civil discourse as the means to effect change;
- to provide them in their first term purposeful and productive challenges in critical thinking;
- to make them at once aware of the powers of their own speech and presentation;
- to demonstrate for them the value of relevant and reliable information;
- to involve them in positive dialogue between the university and the larger community;
- to involve them in scholarly discourse not only with the members of their own class but with all the members of their freshman cohort;
- to make them responsible for contributing to the learning—and the success—of the cohort;
- to provide them instructive opportunities to witness and analyze their own presentations and those of many other students;
- to move them by all these means forward in power.

The Freshman Challenge would proceed by these means:

Academic Discourse:

- All students enrolled in Freshman Challenge read the same book.
- Members of each class, organized into working teams, prepare and are filmed making teaching presentations designed to be interesting and useful to readers of this book.
- Each class analyzes its own work, selects its most successful presentation, and contributes to an even stronger revision of this presentation, which is filmed and made available to every class in the Freshman Challenge.
- River House (UNF's virtual writer's house) hosts the Freshman Challenge online: each class sees the best work of every other class, and each contributes to the learning of all.
- The most successful approaches demonstrate their own worth.

Public Discourse:

- Each year the Freshman Challenge conducts a different grant writing competition for positive civic change.
- Members of each class, organized into working teams, design and then present proposals to address a specific problem—say, for example, designs to improve the troublingly-low high school graduation rate in Jacksonville.
- Each team is filmed as it makes its proposal (enabling student speakers' analysis of their own performance, and competition between proposals advanced in different classes).
- The strongest proposal from each class goes into competition against the strongest proposals from all Challenge classes in each year's freshman cohort.

- A panel of experts, differently constituted depending on the nature of each year's Freshman Challenge—but always including representatives from Academic Affairs—chooses and (modestly) funds the most promising proposal.
- Freshmen grapple with the power of reasoned argument; they see their work effecting change in the world.

(2) Ensure that every student at the 3000 level receives substantial direct instruction in writing and multiple productive challenges to academic fitness for the disciplines. Move toward providing every student at the 3000 level the equivalent of one 3-credit course focused on the development of academic fitness fully adequate to upper level study in each major. We can approach this goal by multiple paths: please see Section 4: Institutional Capability and Implementation.

(3) Add direct instruction in writing to classes that do not provide such instruction, but do presently assign and assess writing. We can by this means move away from the correction approach, in which we rely primarily, to help students improve their writing, on telling them what's wrong with it: in a sense, their learning this way is failure-directed; they learn by getting it wrong. Providing timely direct instruction in writing can shift the focus to strategies for getting it right—with resulting better papers, better grades, and better motivated writers: success is energizing. Providing formative, and not merely summative responses to students' writing can make more of their learning success-directed.

(4) Fund, train, and deploy emissary faculty to deliver focused instruction in writing on demand in classes across the disciplines. In this way we can enable occasional expert writing instruction, customized to need, in any class.

(5) Scale class caps to student experience. In the Freshman Challenge, and in ENC 1101, College Writing--the two foundational courses in academic fitness—set the caps at the disciplinary ideal for writing classes, 15. This will enable very much more individual attention to the work of every student writer than we can provide at present, in ENC 1101, to the least experienced students in the university. Very importantly, it will enable multiple opportunities for speech. Set the caps in the second course in the lower division writing sequence—LIT 2000—at the recommended disciplinary maximum for writing classes, 20; and go to 24 only in LIT 2932, for students who have a full year of experience behind them. As the majority of our students at the 3000 level are transfers new to the university—and very many, coming to the university from community college, struggle to adjust to upper division standards—set the cap in University Scholarship at 20—again, the disciplinary effective maximum.

(5) Provide additional and expanded help from ACE. Secure tutors sufficiently skilled to help the university's most advanced students and tutors especially qualified to help students for whom English is a second language.

Section 4: Institutional Capability and Implementation:

- **Make the case for the practicality of your design. Demonstrate “institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion” of the design you propose.**

This commitment to academic fitness would require adjustments to our graduation requirements. It would require money spent to fund the Freshman Challenge Grant and to add classes, teachers, library specialists, and tutors. It would require coordination.

However, it would rely on kinds of expertise in which the university is already rich. It would have the cooperation of the library and of the Academic Center for Excellence in its development. It could make use of the remarkable expertise of our writing program instructors and the program's teacher training, to support faculty coming from multiple different kinds of expertise to take up the challenge of offering instruction in writing and speech. It could profit from the contributions of first rate faculty in every major. Because it would by degrees make easier the success of UNF's teachers as well as its students, the effort could hope fully to earn the faculty's support.

- **Detail all the resources—whether human, material, academic, or financial—necessary to develop, deploy, and monitor the design you propose.**

Enabling the Freshman Challenge:

The cost of the program would be indexed to the size of each year's freshman cohort, but the formula is predictable: taking into account that faculty at different ranks are paid at even markedly different rates, and planning for a mix of part time and full time faculty, Dr. Peter Braza estimates the cost of adding this one credit class for all FTICs at \$1600.00 per section. Funding the Freshman Challenge Grant would require (regardless of the size of the cohort) \$5,000.00 a year. A Freshman Challenge Coordinator might plan and administrate all elements of the annual competition and serve as a liason, not only between the university and various community enterprises that might be served by the Freshman Challenge, but also between the university and both the Duval County schools and FCCJ, working by better communication to improve the readiness of students destined for UNF. This position might reasonably be funded at \$45,000.

Adding Universal Discipline Specific Direct Instruction at the 3000-level:

Ensuring that every student at the 3000 level gets (at minimum) 3 credit hours instruction designed to build academic fitness will NOT necessitate our adding whole classes in numbers adequate to serve all our junior level students. We can meet this goal with multiple models, as the faculty in the majors agree. We have standing courses that already directly address the challenge: History, for example, has already in place a 3-credit course, "Craft of the Historian," precisely suitable. Communications already has "Advanced Writing for the Media." Four majors already require at the 3000-level research methods courses; where these offer no instruction in writing or in speech, we might consider sistering the methods courses with (1-credit) applications courses, these requiring students to deploy their developing research skills in writing and aloud. Common Boundary courses might be designed in combination to meet this requirement.

For all 3000-level students who do not meet this challenge by any of the models mentioned above—or in classes newly designed to serve this purpose--we can begin to offer, in partnership with the library, a 3000-level University Scholarship course, providing discipline-focused instruction and practice in information management as well as scholarly writing and formal

speech. This 3-credit course can be offered in versions customized to the majors, broadly construed: “University Scholarship in the Natural Sciences,” for example, or “University Scholarship in the Social Sciences,” so that students learn the research processes, scholarly conventions, and source sets most useful to their own fields. University Scholarship can be team taught, with 1/3 of each course devoted to developing information fluency in application, and conducted by a library information specialist--and 2/3 devoted to research-based discipline specific scholarly writing and speech. Here the cost would be indexed to the number of students not otherwise provided for, but again the formula is predictable: Dr. Braza, again presuming a mix of part time and fulltime teachers, but supposing, at the 3000-level, more instructors than adjuncts, and more instructors than tenure track faculty, estimates the cost at \$5,000.00 per 3-credit course.

The library staff would need expansion: Jim Alderman reports that one library information specialist could reasonably manage 6 sections (that is, six 1-credit contributions to University Scholarship courses) each semester. Adding two MLS professionals with teaching experience and strong backgrounds in information fluency would require at minimum \$40,000.00 for each position. These two new positions would bring the library’s core instructional staff to 5, and permit both the addition of many sections of University Scholarship and an expansion of the library’s (already prodigious) program of instruction on demand.

Providing support and furtherance to teachers willing to contribute in important ways to this effort:

We could offer a stipend of \$5000.00 to a teacher who will design and teach a new 3000-level course with a primary focus on building academic fitness for entering majors in a particular department: University Scholarship in English, for example, or University Scholarship in Psychology. We could offer a stipend of \$1000.00 to a teacher who will add to an existing upper division course challenges designed to build academic fitness in at least two regards.

Creating a teaching emissary program to provide focused writing instruction on demand in courses across the disciplines:

Two fulltime instructor positions—each at \$38,000.00—would enable us to launch the emissary program. Each emissary could carry a two-course teaching load in addition to serving as a deployable specialist.

Expanding the capacities of ACE:

Michele Boyette and Karen Reedy report what they would need, most effectively to contribute to this effort:

- Three administrative/professional lines for learning specialists: one with specialization in English as a Second Language; one with interdisciplinary expertise in reading comprehension; and one expert in critical thinking skills. Each of these lines might be funded at \$35,000.00—but each might be filled with a candidate eligible to carry a six credit teaching load in the writing program or the Freshman Challenge. All three of these positions might be designed with flexible assignments, so that as ACE increases its operation, it can claim more of their time.
- Two graduate assistants from English, especially to provide tutoring in writing for advanced students. Each would receive a tuition waiver and \$25,000 for the academic year.

- Money to hire ongoing tutors in “high traffic subjects” and to hire temporary tutors (among them writing program adjuncts or instructors) during periods of “peak usage,” \$7,500.00 to be spent, paying a beginning rate of \$7.50 an hour.

These additional resources will enable ACE to enhance its tutor training, to expand its program of workshops, to add a “Learning Hour” program for students in groups with specialized needs, and to continue and extend its present outreach efforts.

Scaling class caps to student experience:

Particularly because the caps in our lower division writing courses at present are well above disciplinary standards (and indeed our program’s external reviewers this year were insistent that they be lowered), reducing our caps in ENC 1101 to the disciplinary ideal of 15 would add significantly to the cost of our lower division program, but would buy novice students their best chance of success. Our caps are now at 27; going to 15 would raise the cost of covering all our sections by 44%. We can scale this cost to practicality, of course: if we went from our present 27 even to 20, the change would be transformative.

- **Present a plan for initiating your design and monitoring its progress**

An Academic Fitness Planning Team, including representatives from the library, from ACE, and from the writing program, would establish a prioritized timeline for multiple approaches to academic fitness. The team would need to gather information from every major on instruction already in place, to determine the need to add 3000-level classes. We would need to identify the qualifications most desirable in a Freshman Challenge Coordinator, agree on the parameters of that job, and move to fill it: the Freshman Challenge Coordinator would immediately become an important member of the Academic Fitness Planning Team. We could at once recruit faculty in the majors to earn stipends by designing new 3000-level classes to develop academic fitness for the disciplines. Meanwhile, we have already designed a prototype version of a flexible (that is, customizable to the disciplines) 3000-level course in University Scholarship, produced by Writing Program Instructor Jeanette Berger, which we could pilot as early as spring, 2008. We can use the pilot sections to learn from students, faculty, and library information specialists how to strengthen this course. The Academic Fitness Planning Team can delineate all the steps necessary to design, launch, and monitor the Freshman Challenge, and establish a plan to meet them all in order.

Section 5: Assessment and Continuous Improvement:

- **Present a plan for the productive assessment of the progress and the effectiveness of the design you propose. Make clear precisely how you will assess the movement of your plan toward the attainment of its goals.**

The Freshman Challenge will produce evidence on film of our students’ skill in academic and public discourse. We can have individual performances evaluated by teachers, classmates, and the speakers themselves. We can ask students to view their own multiple performances and write analyses speaking not only to achievement but to progress, from one performance to the

next. Panels assessing the Freshman Challenge Grant proposals can also provide useful assessments of the relative strengths of each, in research, planning and presentation.

Students in 3000-level University Scholarship classes will produce papers evidencing their ability to demonstrate academic fitness in multiple regards: we can by collecting and examining sample papers gather useful information about our students' demonstrable skills. Ideally, sets of sample papers would be evaluated in light of rubrics designed by faculty in each major.

We can use the ETS "ICT Literacy Instrument" to assess students' information fluency before and after they complete their 3000-level requirement in Academic Fitness: we can select samples to test, to provide us comparative data about the effectiveness of various models of direct instruction at the 3000-level.

We can add indirect assessment to both these enterprises—the Freshman Challenge, and 3000-level University Scholarship—by conducting online student learning surveys designed on the model of the OLS already in successful use in the writing program: this will enable us to assess students' perceptions of their own progress with regard to particular capacities in academic fitness

- **Make clear how assessment findings will be put to use to secure continuous improvement.**

We can make use of both direct and indirect assessments of the Freshman Challenge and Academic Fitness courses at the 3000-level, to determine where our students are making best progress and where not—and so continually to adjust our efforts to need. The Academic Fitness Planning team, in regular contact, can consider the evidence provided in filmed proposals and presentations, in sample papers, in ETS ITC test results, and in regular administration of the NSSE, not only to monitor but continually to strengthen our pursuit of academic fitness.

We can form a student focus group to consider and respond to our efforts, and regularly offer advice to the Academic Fitness Planning Team.

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