

Writing University Task Force  
Final Report  
Submitted by Chris Merrill and Pat Cain, Co-chairs  
May 28, 2006

Introduction:

In the fall of 2005, Provost Hogan appointed the Writing University Task Force and on November 8, charged the members to:

1. Explore the possibilities for developing synergies among the various groups that might contribute to the reputation of Iowa as the “Writing University,” and
2. Create a 5-year and a 10-year strategic plan for university investment in the “Writing Corridor” or “Writing Community.” Outline ideas about use of space, including possible reassignments of existing space or the creation of new space. Include specific projects that this “community” would engage in, and for any projects that would require new funds, indicate the possible source of that funding.

The Task Force was co-chaired by Pat Cain and Chris Merrill. Task Force members were:

Holly Carver  
Lan Samantha Chang  
Pam Creedon  
David Depew  
Kristine Fitch  
Ed Folsom  
Robin Hemley  
Joe Kearney  
Joan Kjaer  
Alan MacVey  
Amy Margolis  
Jim McPherson  
Jay Semel  
Mary Trachsel  
Steve Ungar  
Russell Valentino  
Jon Wilcox

The Task Force met regularly throughout the rest of the fall semester and during the spring semester.

Overview of Discussions:

With respect to the charge regarding use of space, we explored the possible use of Bowman House and 111 Church as writing spaces that would be preserved for writing

activities. We explored the possibility of relocating the Department of English and related departments so that they would be closer to other key writing units (e.g., Dey and Shambaugh Houses). For example, if the University does build a new Humanities Building in the area of the old water plant, connections between that building and Dey and Shambaugh would be closer. Adding another footbridge across the river at that point would also tie together the Writing units on the east side of campus with Playwriting and other arts campus groups on the west side of the river. Some members of the Task Force met with Joe Hibbard as he was finalizing the campus master plan and he thought this was a good idea to keep in mind for future planning. This possibility of future connection is not articulated in the final campus plan, probably because it is too specific, so we mention it here as something that should be kept in mind as the campus is built out further.

Because a number of the specific projects discussed by the Task Force would require significant financial investment, the group also met with a representative from the Foundation to consider fundraising mechanisms. Examples of case statements were shared with the group. We believe a case statement can be created for most of the proposals that we suggest in this report for further consideration. It might also make sense to create a “Writing University” Foundation account to which donors could give if they didn’t have specific purposes or restrictions in mind.

Participants made a number of proposals for specific projects, all of which were discussed and reviewed by the full committee. White papers for most of these proposals were posted on the sharepoint web site that was used to by the Task Force to facilitate communication. Some proposals were discussed and dropped due to cost or insufficient support (e.g., the possible acquisition of the Dalkey Archive Press). Minutes of all meetings are also available on the sharepoint site.

During the period that the Task Force met, another working group focused on development of the Virtual Writing University. Their deliberations were reported to the Task Force and Josh Kaine, a key member of that group, met regularly with the Task Force. Other key participants in the virtual writing university discussions included Jon Winet (Multimedia) and Jim Elmborg (SLIS). A number of other people made presentations to the group or helped develop proposals, e.g., David Hamilton (Iowa Review), Margaret Thompson (POROI), Mark Peterson (History), Tom Lewis (Spanish and Portuguese), Maryann Rasmussen (English Honors), Rod Lehnertz (Facilities Management), Nancy Baker (University Libraries), Brooks Landon (English) and Aimee Carrillo Rowe (Rhetoric).

The co-chairs provided the Provost with an interim report in March. Ultimately the list of projects was narrowed to 16 and Task Force members were asked to indicate their support for each proposal through an anonymous survey. Those results are reported below.

In addition, the Task Force has discussed the creation of a digital humanities center and has invited two consultants from a similar center at the University of Nebraska to visit

with members of the Task Force and Central Administration. That visit will occur on June 19<sup>th</sup> and so there may be additional recommendations that stem from that visit.

### Specific Projects:

These are the specific projects that had sufficient support by some members of the Task Force to make it to our final survey. They are described below just as they were on the survey. Those projects with the most widespread support are listed at the top.

1. Director of Translation Studies (\$15K - \$50K recurring) Founded in the early 1970s, the UI MFA in literary translation, the oldest such program in the country, is housed in the Department of Cinema and Comparative Literature. As literary translation depends both on foreign language and literature expertise and the ability to create effective English-language artistic works, the program has long served as a nexus between foreign language and literature study and the writing units across campus. It has been without a director for some seven years, surviving on the good will of affiliated faculty and the energy of its devoted students. The Task Force strongly recommends that the hiring of a director be a top priority. Funding should probably come from the College. The cost to support a director at 50% could vary from \$15K to \$50K, depending on whether the person was hired from within or outside the University. The Task Force proposal is a recommendation to the Provost that he make filling this position a top priority in his communications with the Dean.

2. Center for the Book (\$19K one time). Support the transition of Center for the Book from CLAS to Graduate College with a one time infusion of funds to bring programming and staffing back up to year ago levels. (Estimated cost - \$19,000 for 2006/07; after that support from Graduate College).

3. Iowa Review (~\$2500 now, maybe more in the future). The Iowa Review should continue. We ask the Provost to appoint a review committee, including an expert external reviewer, to review the Review's operations and suggest strategies for future success. Estimated cost: \$2500 for the review. Possible future costs if a new director is hired from outside or is not already supported by an academic salary.

4. The Writing Neighborhood (Bowman and 111 Church) (\$5K now, future FREC funds). We recommend hiring a consultant from Facilities Management to develop a budget for the acquisition and renovation of these two houses to be used for the following purposes: POROI, Electronic Journals, Virtual Writing University, a possible Humanities Technology Center, some space for Center for the Book, a home for Writing Fellows (see full proposal below), a community writing center, the Iowa Review, space for visiting writers, and an Espresso Bar. We ask the Provost to make this a priority for central university funds that are available for space projects such as this (e.g., FREC). There might be a short term cost to the Provost (e.g., \$5,000) to pay for the consulting that will help to develop the full proposal.

5. Spanish Creative Writing Workshop. This workshop is taking off successfully and we believe it is worthy of continued support. Estimated cost: None at the present time.

6. Writing Certificate. Iowa identifies itself as the Writing University and expository writing is a skill crucial for every undergraduate. This proposal will provide undergraduate students the opportunity to become better writers, whatever their major or area of interest, and to receive a certificate that attests to their concentration on writing. Both the skills and the credential will serve students well in seeking employment. The new certificate can be offered at minimal cost by building on existing courses; its presence may encourage departments to create new courses that center on writing skills. Estimated cost: minimal. The primary request is that the Provost support the further exploration of this option and see that it is approved by the appropriate bodies.

7. Five Year Celebration of Writing (\$15,000) This would entail a series of events starting this fall and extending five years into the future as the Workshop moves from its 70th to its 75th anniversary. Many off campus events would occur around the country, coordinated with the Alumni Association. Some events would occur on campus. The Task Force endorses the concept and asks the Provost to explore ways to make these coordinated events happen. Estimated cost: Minimal (no more than \$15,000 over the five year term).

8. Virtual Writing University (\$50,000) A separate Task Force has developed a working plan to launch a web site that would create the "virtual writing university." Support to set up the web site has been provided in the form of a post-doctoral fellow, funded jointly by the Graduate College and the IWP, with technical support from the University webmaster and University Relations. Ultimately, the goal would be to find a commercial underwriter for the site. But first, we need to create some content. Additional support from the Provost may be needed before a commercial underwriter is in place. We ask for up to \$50,000 over the next two years as seed money to help expand the site and seek an underwriter.

9. Writing Fellows (proposed by Samantha Chang) (\$20,000 in 2007, up to additional \$40,000 recurring). Each Fellow would receive a stipend of \$10,000 from the University. He/she would be given an office and the opportunity to live in the Writers' House. It is expected that while some Fellows will welcome the opportunity to live and work in the house, others will prefer to live off campus and use the house as writing studio space. Fellows would be chosen from graduating students in the Writers' Workshop, the Nonfiction Writing Program, the Translation Program, the Drama Department (Playwriting), and the School of Journalism. The number of programs and departments involved would depend on the space made available; ideally the Institute would include Fellows in poetry, fiction, nonfiction, translation, playwriting, and journalism. Fellows would be chosen after submitting project proposals, which would each include a letter of application, a project description, a writing sample, and a proposal of service commitment. Estimated cost: For four fellows, the recurring cost would be at least \$40,000 per year. It is anticipated that private funding of individual fellows would be

attractive to donors and would provide naming opportunities. Costs to renovate the property (Bowman) would be borne centrally as with all such capital projects.

10. Undergraduate major in creative writing. Estimated recurring cost \$180,000, which includes \$100,000 for a director. Planning should occur during 06/07, to be taken to the Regents for approval in spring of 2007, and funding would begin in 07/08. This would be a competitive program for approximately 100 students who would be admitted at the end of their first year. The recommendation to the Provost for now would be to see that a committee is appointed to develop the details of the proposal and shepherd it through the required approvals. Then, if approved, the financial commitment will kick in.

11. Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers' Workshop (\$20,000). The proposal is to move this summer workshop from Michigan State to Iowa. While we don't have all the details of the costs involved, it is likely that we could run this in conjunction with our summer writing festival and eventually turn a profit. Our best guess is that we'd need the Provost to invest \$10,000 to \$20,000 as seed money to bring the program here and turn into a profitable program. We recommend exploring this possibility with an eye toward moving the program here by summer of 2007.

12. Certificate in Publishing (\$10K - \$30K recurring). A good draft proposal has been submitted to the Task Force and discussed. It appears that a certificate program of 18 to 24 credit hours could be implemented with minimal costs. The program should include an internship with a publishing entity (e.g., UI Press, Iowa Review). The responsibility for coordinating courses and internships could be shared by the UI Press and Department of English, but they would need some additional staff to oversee this. At a minimum someone would have to serve as director and someone would have to teach the basic course. The cost to provide oversight could run from \$10K to \$30K, depending on what sort of staff support was added.

13. New PhD program in Writing and Public Culture. (minimal cost) The Rhetoric Department proposes to establish and administer an interdisciplinary PhD program that will train already accomplished writers to become public intellectuals. In the increasingly contestatory nature of our democracy, the role of the public intellectual is becoming even more crucial, while the site for training public intellectuals is perhaps the most visible bridge linking the academy with the public. The program is envisioned as one that will attract MFA students and so could be designed as a three-year-to-degree program. A maximum of 6 students (2 per year) would not cause any new significant costs, although it might result in some internal reallocations from one graduate program to another. The specific proposal to the Provost is to see that appropriate steps are taken to flesh out the details of the program and route it through the appropriate approval processes up to the Board of Regents.

14. Editorial Writing Project. (\$7500 for pilot). This proposal comes from Pam Creedon and is now styled as: Promoting "The Writing University." The goal of this proposed project is to enhance the visibility of "The Writing University" nationally and internationally by working with various program directors and faculty members to

develop editorials or op-ed pieces that are submitted to major newspapers, periodicals and other media venues. The nature of the writing or the topic will vary significantly. The proposal involves providing funding to someone, who will work individually with authors. Increasing the visibility of "The Writing University" through the intellect of individuals who represent it is central to our promotional effort. Cost: The proposal could involve an hourly consulting fee or a contract payment for working with "X" number of faculty/directors/authors, probably a stipend of \$7,000 or \$7,500 (similar to what is paid for an adjunct for teaching a three hour semester course). This could start as a pilot project for one semester, which would be renewed only if results are considered satisfactory.

15. Eye-City Extra: Culture and Community magazine (\$30,000 for pilot). This will be a non-profit education-based magazine venture -- published once a year but with the possibility of "extras" should the need and/or opportunity arise -- showcasing non-fiction writing, art and photography produced by University of Iowa and Iowa City area talent. The substantive emphasis will be people, the arts, and culture-writ-large (as in modes of work and ways of life) of the community and region, including profiles, ethnographic accounts, reportage and essays. The publication is both by and for local constituencies--but subject matter will extend to the global, since the locality is also an international crossroads. Profile subjects might range from an international writer-in-residence to a large animal vet working with Amish farmers; examples of depth features could range from Iowa City's hidden underclass to the "native" and Transcendental Meditation children of Fairfield; community service pieces might examine global foodstuffs and cuisine, ethnic churches or varied schools of yoga. Support will be sought for a year-one prototype --with a pilot editorial/artistic group of UI faculty, students and staff and with guidance from a community advisory board; an entrepreneurial team will be enlisted to develop a sponsorship plan to ensure continuing publication and viability. Estimated cost for pilot: \$30,000 (wild guess by Pat and Chris)

16. Visiting Writing Fellows (\$50,000 recurring). The original proposal came from the History Department and envisioned a visiting writer of books that might be described as "popular history." The Task Force discussed possible extensions of this concept into other areas, and even at one point considered the creation of a think tank of such writers from a number of disciplines. Estimated cost: a minimum of \$50,000 per year per scholar.

#### Degree of Support and Recommendations.

The co-chairs believe there is sufficient support for the first 13 items to move forward on them. Item 2 has already been accomplished with the transfer to the Grad College and your previous commitment for the one time funds. Items 4 and 9 are related and are in process. After meeting with FM at Bowman, we've decided to move POROI and the electronic journals there, with space for the Virtual Writing University as well (and space to grow). We are recommending the use of 111 Church as a "writers' house" to house the fellows described in item 9. Chris Merrill may be able to fund two fellows during the 2007 year. It is not clear what renovation will be required, but we have asked FM to

determine that. We are not proposing that you pay for any renovation, but rather that we find the money centrally (e.g., FREC). Also, in the short run, using the space for writers' residences and offices will not likely call for much of an investment.

This list includes proposals for four new academic programs: certificate in writing, certificate in publishing, new undergraduate major, and a new PhD. All of these proposals would need to go through a review process and the major and PhD would ultimately need Board approval. We recommend pursuing all these proposals at this time, and then once you have a firmer basis upon which to estimate costs, you can decide whether to implement.

The Clarion proposal makes a lot of sense if it really costs only \$10,000 to \$20,000. We recommend taking a closer look at this one. Brooks Landon and Chet Rzonca and Amy Margolis could work on this together.