



# EVALUATION OF THE DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY 2004 FACULTY WRITING FORUM

December, 2004

Prepared by:

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in Collaboration with  
the Faculty Writing Forum Sponsors:



*Standards-Based  
Teacher Education  
Project (STEP)*

**WAC**

*Writing Across  
the Curriculum  
Committee*



*Student  
Engagement  
Champions*

## **EVALUATION OF THE DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY 2004 FACULTY WRITING FORUM**

Alan Barton, Ph.D.

### **Introduction**

The quality of student writing has been an increasing concern in academic institutions across the country. The topic is raised frequently in informal conversations among Delta State University (DSU) faculty, and survey results suggest DSU students are not assigned as many papers in courses as students at peer institutions. DSU has initiated a variety of programs to help students improve their writing skills. One is a series of three on-campus events during the 2004-05 academic year, sponsored by the Standards-based Teacher Education Project (STEP). The first event, a writing forum for DSU faculty, was held on November 15, 2004. The Writing Across the Curriculum Committee and the Student Engagement Champions joined the STEP project as sponsors of this event (See Appendix D for information on the sponsors).

### **Faculty Writing Forum**

The Faculty Writing Forum convened at 2:00 pm in the Bologna Performing Arts Center (BPAC) Recital Hall. A total of sixty participants attended, including faculty members and administrators. The university's three colleges and one professional school were represented. The forum was divided into two parts. In the first half, faculty members representing various groups on campus that promote good writing presented brief synopses of their projects and the resources they make available to students and faculty. After a short break, the group reconvened for an open discussion of writing issues, moderated by Collier Parker, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. While participants were not restricted in discussion topics, they were asked to consider several questions prior to the forum, including:

- How do you incorporate writing in your classroom?
- What barriers do you face in incorporating writing in your classroom?
- What does writing mean in your discipline?
- What can STEP, WAC and SEC do to help you increase the amount and quality of writing instruction in your classroom?
- What can the faculty, departments/divisions and colleges do to increase the amount and quality of writing instruction in your classroom?

These questions served as a starting point for the group discussion. The discussion lasted approximately 40 minutes, and the Writing Forum ended at about 3:45 p.m. See Appendix A for the program to the Faculty Writing Forum.

## Evaluation Design

The evaluation of the Faculty Writing Forum was done with a simple, brief questionnaire distributed by e-mail to all participants who signed the attendance sheet at the event (See Appendix B). The questionnaire was attached as a pdf file, and participants were asked to print out the form, fill it out, and return it. The first e-mail was sent on November 18, 2004. A follow-up e-mail, sent on November 29, 2004, thanked those who had already responded and requested that non-respondents fill out and return the attached questionnaire. Questionnaires were collected through December 10, 2004.

Respondents were assured that their responses were confidential, and they were not asked to put their name on the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was sent to all sixty forum participants, and thirty-one returned their completed questionnaires. This is a response rate of 51.67%. The data were analyzed by tabulating responses to each question and displaying responses on histograms.

## Results

Of the thirty-one respondents, 27 (87.1%) attended the entire two-hour event (Table 1). Four (12.9%) of the respondents attended only the first hour, and no respondents reported attending only the second hour of the event.

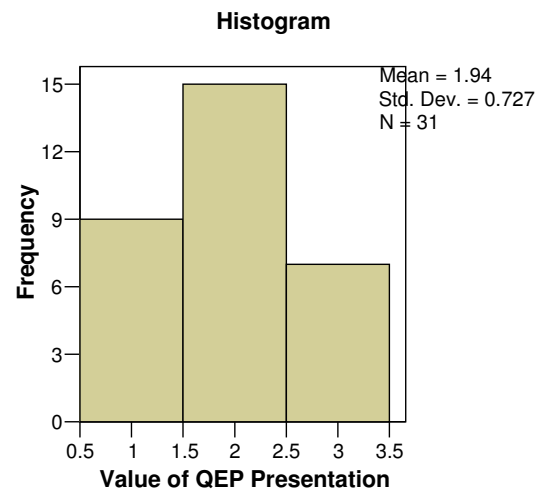
**Table 1: Portion of the Faculty Writing Forum the Respondent Attended**

	Frequency	Percent
All or Most of First Hour Only	4	12.9
Entire Two Hour Forum	27	87.1
Total	31	100.0

### ***Evaluation of the First Hour***

Following introductions, the first portion of the Faculty Writing Forum focused on a definition of the problem of writing on campus. Respondents were asked to evaluate the value of these presentations. First, Elise Jenkins, the chair of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) committee, gave a brief summary of the QEP process. Responses are shown in Table 2. Seven respondents (22.6%) characterized the presentation on the QEP as “very valuable,” fifteen (48.4%) said this presentation was “somewhat valuable,” and nine (29.0%) said the presentation on the QEP was “not very valuable.”

	Frequency	Percent
Not Very Valuable	9	29.0
Somewhat Valuable	15	48.4
Very Valuable	7	22.6
Total	31	100.0

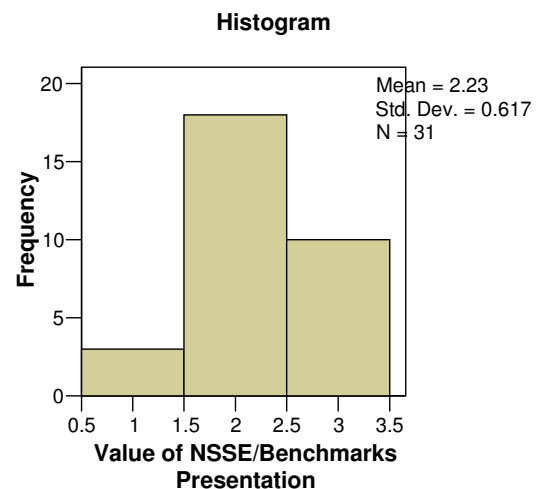


**Table 2: Value of the QEP Presentation**

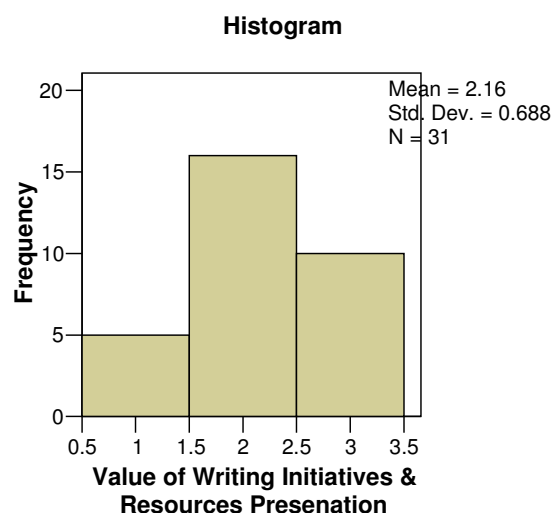
Next, Luther Brown and Darlene Crone-Todd, two of the 2004-05 Student Engagement Champions, discussed the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), a critical tool that DSU is using to measure its progress on the QEP. Dr. Brown talked about what NSSE is, and the Benchmarks for Effective Educational Practice that the NSSE uses. Dr. Crone-Todd presented selected results from the NSSE survey conducted at DSU in 2003. Results of the evaluation of these presentations are shown in Table 3. Ten respondents (32.3%) said that the discussion of the NSSE standards and the Benchmarks was “very valuable,” eighteen

**Table 3: Value of the NSSE/Benchmarks Presentation**

	Frequency	Percent
Not Very Valuable	3	9.7
Somewhat Valuable	18	58.1
Very Valuable	10	32.3
Total	31	100.0



	Frequency	Percent
Not Very Valuable	5	16.1
Somewhat Valuable	16	51.6
Very Valuable	10	32.3
Total	31	100.0



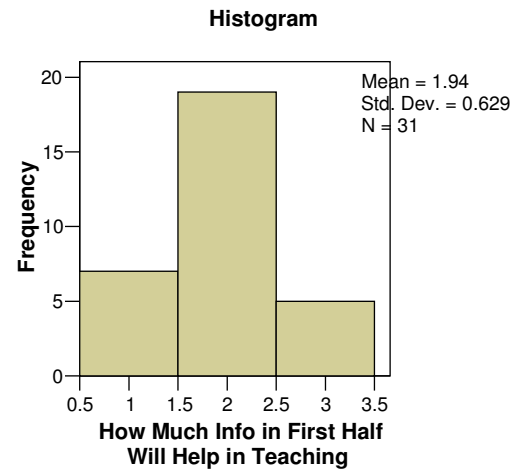
**Table 4: Value of Writing Initiatives & Resources Presentation**

respondents (58.1%) reported that this portion of the event was “somewhat valuable,” and only three respondents (9.7%) characterized this presentation as “not very valuable.”

Next, various presenters discussed writing initiatives on campus. Karen Bell talked about recent activities of the Writing Across the Curriculum Committee, Marilyn Schultz discussed the Understanding Through Literacy Committee, Hines Cronin talked about the Standards-based Teacher Education Project (STEP), one of the sponsors of this event, and Alan Barton promoted future writing events, currently in the planning stages. Several speakers also talked about writing resources on campus. Susan Allen Ford discussed the Writing Center, Michael Mounce and Joi Phillips told about writing programs at Roberts-LaForge Library, and Diane Blansett discussed the Academic Support Lab. Table 4 summarizes results from a question asking about the value of these presentations. Ten respondents (32.3%) said that the discussion of writing initiatives and resources was “very valuable,” sixteen respondents (51.6%) said these presentations were “somewhat valuable,” and five respondents (16.1%) indicated that these presentations were “not very valuable.”

Finally, to assess the practical value of the presentations on the QEP, and the writing initiative and resources, respondents were asked how much they thought the information shared in the first half would help them in their teaching. Results are shown in Table 5. Five respondents (16.1%) indicated that the first half presentations would help them a lot in their teaching, nineteen respondents (61.3%) said these presentations would help them some, and seven

	Frequency	Percent
Not Very Much	7	22.6
Some	19	61.3
A Lot	5	16.1
Total	31	100.0



**Table 5: How Much the Information in the First Half of the Program Will Help in Teaching**

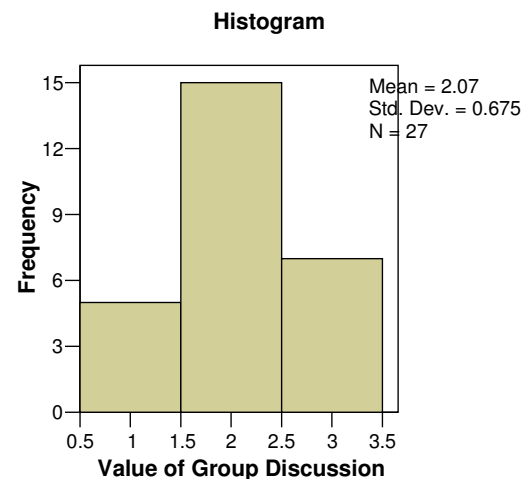
respondents (22.6%) said the information presented in the first half of the forum would not help them very much.

### ***Evaluation of the Second Hour***

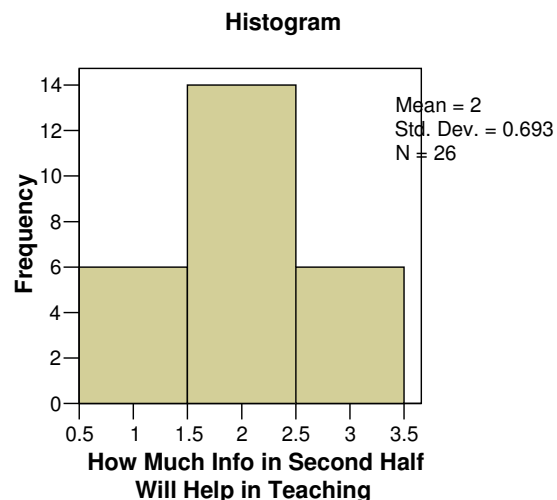
During the second half of the Faculty Writing Forum, participants engaged in a group discussion to generate ideas about how to improve writing instruction at Delta State (See Appendix C for a summary of discussion topics). Table 6 summarizes responses to a question asking the value of the group discussion. Four people left after the first hour, so they did not respond to this

**Table 6: Value of the Group Discussion**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Not Very Valuable	5	16.1	18.5
Somewhat Valuable	15	48.4	55.6
Very Valuable	7	22.6	25.9
Missing	4	12.9	
Total	31	100.0	



	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Not Very Much	6	19.4	23.1
Some	14	45.2	53.8
A Lot	6	19.4	23.1
Missing	5	16.1	
Total	31	100.0	



**Table 7: How Much the Information in the Second Half of the Program Will Help in Teaching**

question. Seven of the remaining 27 respondents (25.9%) found the group discussion “very valuable,” fifteen (55.6%) said the group discussion was “somewhat valuable,” and five (18.5%) indicated that the group discussion was “not very valuable.”

Respondents were also asked how much the information discussed in the second half of the Writing Forum would help them in their teaching. Results are summarized in Table 7. Six respondents (23.1%) indicated the discussion would help them a lot, fourteen (53.8%) said the discussion would help them some, and six (23.1%) said the discussion would not help them very much in their classes.

### ***Future Writing Events***

Respondents were asked two open-ended questions. The first asked for comments on the Faculty Writing Forum and for suggestions on future writing events. The second asked for specific suggestions on topics or speakers for the two writing events to be held in conjunction with the Faculty Writing Forum in February and April, 2005.

Fourteen of the thirty-one respondents added comments in response to the first question. Three of these comments provided suggestions on how to run the forum. All three suggested breaking the group into sub-groups for discussion, then having each sub-group report back to

the entire group. One additionally suggested bringing in an expert who can guide us with effective strategies to improve writing.

Seven of the comments in response to the first question dealt with the quality of the Faculty Writing Forum. These ranged from a simple “well done” to comments on specific parts of the forum. In general these comments were positive. One respondent commented that the discussion session focused more on the problem than on solutions, but noted this may be a good first step in the process. One respondent appreciated the data on NSSE, and another noted the section on resources available to students was helpful.

Four of the comments presented suggestions for future programs. One noted we need to focus on good reading in order to improve writing and speaking. Another suggested we address the issue of increased workload on faculty from reading and grading writing assignments. A third wanted more discussion such as during the second part of the forum. The fourth comment suggested similar programs to deal with students’ computational skills, reading skills and critical thinking skills.

Fourteen respondents also addressed the second question, asking for specific suggestions for the February and April 2005 writing programs. Three of these pertained directly to the design of future programs, including suggestions for speakers or for characteristics of a future speaker. One requested a speaker with expertise on the southern dialect that can assist us with issues that pertain directly to this region, while another suggested a format in which participants are given something to write about, then instructed in how to write about it.

Three responses emphasized attitudes and skills that students need to develop. One respondent recommended attention to citation formats. Two others noted that students do not value good writing skills more and fail to perceive how bad writing could be a problem for them.

Six responses focused on knowledge and skills for instructors. These included rubrics for evaluating writing, mentioned by two respondents; strategies to improve writing effectiveness, mentioned by three respondents; instruction in using on-line resources to improve writing, enhance classroom communication, and detect plagiarism, noted by two respondents; and information on “literacy coaching,” requested by one respondent.

Three respondents commented on the need to better understand how to design a program to address student writing. One suggested a focus on models of writing across the curriculum



programs in settings similar to DSU, another suggested a focus on writing in the disciplines, and a third suggested we consider the issue of developing writing-intensive courses at DSU to replace our current voluntary approach to incorporating writing into classrooms.

## **Discussion**

Overall, the general sense that emerges from this evaluation is that most participants were satisfied with the event and the information that was shared, although there was room for improvement. For each of the questions, between fourteen and nineteen of the respondents chose the middle answer. This suggests that the dominant assessment was that participants found the event worthwhile, but neither exceptional nor without purpose.

Respondents expressed the most satisfaction with the portion of the forum that summarized results from the NSSE. Over 90% of the respondents found the NSSE results somewhat or very valuable. The NSSE data reported at the forum suggested:

- DSU students report writing fewer papers than the national average
- DSU students' reported perceptions about the amount of time spent studying and working on academic work are similar to the national average
- DSU students report spending less time preparing for class than do students nationwide

The NSSE surveys DSU freshmen and seniors, and is a good indicator of their perceptions. These data present valuable information for faculty to know, both about DSU student perceptions, and about standards at peer institutions.

Respondents also appreciated the information on writing initiatives and resources on campus. About 85% of the respondents indicated that this portion of the forum was somewhat or very valuable. Faculty should be aware of the diverse programs discussed during this section, but it takes new faculty awhile to learn about the various resources on campus. The fact that such a large percentage of the participants found this section useful perhaps suggests that a greater effort to advertise these programs to DSU faculty would be appreciated.

The presentation on the QEP generated the least favorable responses. About 30% of the respondents indicated that the QEP presentation was not valuable. This is not an exceptionally discouraging finding, as about 23% of the respondents indicated the QEP presentation was very valuable; however, of the questions asked on the evaluation, this one drew the most unfavorable responses. The data collected don't allow an assessment of respondent characteristics, but it is possible that many of those that found the QEP information less valuable were involved in the QEP process or had attended meetings as the QEP was being

developed, and thus were already familiar with the information presented, while those that indicated the QEP presentation was very valuable were newer faculty who were not as familiar with the QEP.

Over three-fourths of the respondents indicated that both parts of the writing forum would help them some or a lot in their teaching. This is a very encouraging finding, as it suggests that the Faculty Writing Forum had practical applications other than just generating discussion on the issue of writing. We have a tremendous wealth of educational experience on our faculty at DSU, but do not always have opportunities to engage each other in dialogue that allows us to take advantage of each other's knowledge and experience in positive ways. Dialogue of this nature may occur within departments in a more informal manner, but it does not necessarily occur on a regular basis across disciplines, nor in formal settings.

There also were very positive sentiments expressed about continuing programs of this type in the future. The DSU faculty showed support and interest in the issue of improving student writing by attending this forum, and the positive results generated in this evaluation suggest that faculty will continue to support programs of this nature in the future. One respondent suggested extending this format to discuss ideas for teaching other skills where faculty perceive students are weak, such as computation and critical thinking. In any case, the Faculty Writing Forum showed that many on the DSU faculty appreciate and take advantage of opportunities to interact with colleagues, in order to improve our students' education, and would continue to support programs of this nature in the future.

**APPENDIX A:  
SCHEDULE FOR THE FACULTY WRITING FORUM**

(1) Welcome and Introduction

John Thornell, Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Collier Parker, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

(2) Defining the Problem

(a) History of DSU's Quality Enhancement Plan  
Elise Jenkins, QEP Chair

(b) Explanation of the National Survey of Student Engagement  
and Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice  
Luther Brown, Student Engagement Champion

(c) Sharing of National Survey of Student Engagement Results  
Darlene Crone-Todd, Student Engagement Champion

(3) Improving Writing at DSU

(a) Writing Across the Curriculum Committee  
Karen Bell, Chair

(b) Understanding Through Literacy Committee  
Marilyn Schultz, Chair

(c) STEP Project  
Hines Cronin, Coordinator

(d) Future Writing Seminars/Workshops  
Alan Barton, Coordinator

(4) Writing Resources on Campus

(a) Writing Center  
Susan Allen Ford, Director

(b) Roberts-LaForge Library  
Michael Mounce & Joi Phillips, Librarians

(c) Academic Support Lab  
Diane Blansett, Director

BREAK (5 minutes)

(5) Group Discussion: Where Do We Go From Here?  
Collier Parker, Moderator

Participation by all in Attendance

**APPENDIX B:  
EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE**

*Please check the response that best represents your opinion.*

(1) What portion of the Faculty Writing Forum did you attend?

- \_\_\_\_\_ (a) The entire two-hour forum
- \_\_\_\_\_ (b) All or most of the first hour only (presentations)
- \_\_\_\_\_ (c) All or most of the second hour only (discussion)

*The first portion of the forum consisted of presentations on the Quality Enhancement Plan, NSSE, and Writing Initiatives and Resources on Campus.*

(2) How valuable was the presentation on the Quality Enhancement Plan to you?

- \_\_\_\_\_ (a) Very valuable; I learned a lot I did not know.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (b) Somewhat valuable; I learned some information I did not know.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (c) Not very valuable; I already knew almost everything that was presented.

(3) How valuable were the presentations on NSSE, the Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice, and Delta State's NSSE results to you?

- \_\_\_\_\_ (a) Very valuable; I learned a lot I did not know.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (b) Somewhat valuable; I learned some information I did not know.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (c) Not very valuable; I already knew almost everything that was presented.

(4) How valuable were the presentations on Writing Initiatives and Resources to you?

- \_\_\_\_\_ (a) Very valuable; I learned a lot I did not know.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (b) Somewhat valuable; I learned some information I did not know.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (c) Not very valuable; I already knew almost everything that was presented.

(5) How much do you think the information presented in the first portion of the forum will help you in your teaching?

- \_\_\_\_\_ (a) A lot
- \_\_\_\_\_ (b) Some
- \_\_\_\_\_ (c) Not very much

*The second portion of the writing forum consisted of a moderated discussion among all participants.*

(6) How valuable was the group discussion to you?

\_\_\_\_\_ (a) Very valuable; I took away several new ideas.

\_\_\_\_\_ (b) Somewhat valuable; I took away one or two new ideas.

\_\_\_\_\_ (c) Not very valuable; I didn't learn anything new.

(7) How much do you think the discussion and ideas shared during the second portion of the forum will help you in your teaching?

\_\_\_\_\_ (a) A lot

\_\_\_\_\_ (b) Some

\_\_\_\_\_ (c) Not very much

(8) Please add any comments about this forum, or suggestions for future events of this type:

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(9) We have two seminars/workshops scheduled for February 17-18, and April 2005, and may include other events as part of the Writing Across the Curriculum initiative. Please suggest writing-related topics that you would like to see included in future workshops and seminars, and names/affiliations of speakers that you would like us to invite to Delta State to speak about writing:

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Thank you for participating in this evaluation! Please send your completed questionnaire through campus mail to Bill Spencer at Kent Wyatt Hall 228. This evaluation is confidential, so do not put your name on this form.

## **APPENDIX C: GROUP DISCUSSION TOPICS**

The second half of the Faculty Writing Forum consisted of a moderated discussion on writing issues at DSU. The discussion lasted about 45 minutes and covered a variety of topics. While there were no specific parameters as to the topic of the discussion, participants were asked to consider the following questions prior to the event:

How do you incorporate writing in your classroom?

- What barriers do you face in incorporating writing in your classroom?
- What does writing mean in your discipline?
- What can STEP, WAC and SEC do to help you increase the amount and quality of writing instruction in your classroom?
- What can the faculty, departments/divisions and colleges do to increase the amount and quality of writing instruction in your classroom?

One topic that generated substantial discussion was the interaction between technology and writing. There was some concern expressed that students do too much research for papers on the internet, and that technology was having a negative effect on student writing in general. Later, however, a positive use of technology was discussed, as the idea was presented that Banner or a similar program may have the capacity to post student papers on-line. This would be useful to faculty to check the work of students in other classes, and assess their progress over time. This would also help students as they could build a portfolio of their work.

The issue of plagiarism was also discussed. It was suggested that students are less likely to plagiarize on shorter assignments – papers of three pages or so, but that it was common for students to plagiarize longer papers. One of the NSSE findings was that DSU students write fewer long papers than students at peer institutions, and perhaps they are not getting enough experience to be able to write such papers without plagiarizing. It was also mentioned that the DSU Library has an on-line guide for both faculty and students pertaining to plagiarism.

Forum participants also expressed concern for grading writing assignments. Several people mentioned the need for standardized grading rubrics, so that we can be more objective in grading writing across disciplines and so students would get reasonably consistent messages. It was suggested that the WAC committee serve as a clearinghouse for grading rubrics. Several participants expressed concern over grading grammar vs. content. One issue in grading grammar is the issue of regional dialects vs. standard English prose.

Finally, participants discussed the design of a writing across the curriculum program. There was support for developing writing intensive courses in various disciplines.

Thanks to Greg Hospodor for taking notes during the Faculty Writing Forum. Dr. Hospodor's notes formed the basis of this summary of the discussion topics.

## **APPENDIX D: FACULTY WRITING FORUM SPONSORS**

### **The Standards-based Teacher Education Project (STEP)**

The STEP project was developed by the American Association of College for Teacher Education (AACTE) and the now-defunct Council for Basic Education (CBE). The mission of the STEP project is to enhance accountability in institutions that prepare K–12 teachers. STEP helps teacher-training institutions assess teacher preparedness, in accordance with academic content standards.

Dr. Hines Cronin is the STEP coordinator for the DSU campus.

The STEP project provided funding and coordination for the DSU Faculty Writing Forum.

### **The Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Committee**

Writing Across the Curriculum initiatives have surfaced on campuses across the country in the past twenty years as a strategy to incorporate more varied writing experiences into college classrooms. WAC is based on the premise that writing is a valuable learning tool that encourages students to develop higher-order thinking skills, including the ability to synthesize, analyze and apply information. To date, DSU has encouraged WAC on a voluntary basis. Recently, a new WAC committee was formed to promote WAC efforts and to increase the profile of writing in the disciplines across campus.

Dr. Karen Bell, Assistant Professor of German, is the chair of the Writing Across the Curriculum Committee. Other members of the committee include Dr. Marilyn Schultz, Assistant Professor of English; Dr. Maud Kuykendall, Assistant Professor of Special Education; Dr. Bobby Moore, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice; Dr. Greg Hospodor, Assistant Professor of History; Dr. Vicki Hartley, Associate Professor of Special Education; Mr. Ron Pedro, Assistant Professor of Commercial Aviation; Dr. Jenetta Waddell, Assistant Professor of Education; Ms. Lisa Oswalt, Instructor in Nursing; Mr. Charles Metcalf, Instructor in Commercial Aviation; Mr. Tim Colbert, Instructor in Health, Physical Education and Recreation; and Dr. Milton Wilder, Professor of Health, Physical Education and Recreation.

The WAC committee assisted in the planning, preparation and execution of the Faculty Writing Forum.



### **The Student Engagement Champions (SEC)**

DSU's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) of 2003, part of the university's on-going accreditation process, focuses on the concept of student engagement as the core objective over the next evaluation period. The Student Engagement Champions were created to oversee initiatives to increase student engagement in all aspects of the university. Five SECs were appointed early in 2004 to serve during the 2004-05 academic year. Over the subsequent four years, five new SECs will be appointed each year. Each group of SECs will represent the university's three colleges and one professional school.

Dr. Darlene Crone-Todd, Assistant Professor of Psychology, is the chair of the 2004-05 Student Engagement Champions. Other SECs include Ms. Jan Cooper, Instructor of CIS and Business Education; Dr. Luther Brown, the Director of the Delta Center for Culture and Learning and Professor of Biology; Dr. Alan Barton, Assistant Professor of Sociology and Community Development; and Ms. Catherine Hayes, Instructor in Nursing.

The Student Engagement Champions assisted in the planning, preparation, organization, execution and evaluation of the Faculty Writing Forum.

Comments or questions on this report are welcome.

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