External Review Report of the Academic and Technical Writing Program

March 2025

External Review Committee

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Executive Summary

The Academic and Technical Writing Program (ATWP) was established as a non-departmentalized program within the Faculty of Humanities in 2020, replacing the previous Division of Academic Writing (DAWR). This change aimed to create a more effective administrative structure for delivering courses that meet the University of Victoria's (UVic) Academic Writing Requirement (AWR). ATWP oversees its budgeting, scheduling, and hiring, with the Director reporting directly to the Dean's Office. Each year, ATWP offers a substantial number of AWR courses, along with a smaller selection of additional writing-focused courses. The delivery of AWR courses involves significant coordination with other programs and admissions staff to anticipate and manage enrollment effectively.

UVic commissioned an external review of ATWP in line with its academic program review protocols. The review was conducted virtually in March 2025. This report marks the first official external review of ATWP in its current form, following a previous commissioned consultant review of the AWR conducted in 2018 by Louise Whetherby Phelps and Shirley Rose from the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA).

The External Review Committee (Committee) recognizes that ATWP members are deeply committed to delivering quality writing instruction for UVic students. However, recent budget cuts have negatively impacted ATWP's operations, resulting in higher workloads for instructors due to increased class sizes beyond recommended levels for writing-intensive courses. Despite its crucial role in delivering a university-wide course requirement, ATWP is under-resourced and understaffed, relying heavily on sessional instructors to deliver its courses and over-burdening the Director with administrative tasks that would typically be handled by staff. All of this has contributed to lowered overall morale in the program, even though sessionals, full-time faculty, staff, and program administration remain dedicated, involved, and hopeful.

The Committee submits that these issues must be given attention so that ATWP remains a strong unit that is able to deliver its mandate. The Committee also recognizes and highlights that UVic and ATWP have consistently, since at least 2018, attempted to address issues and

concerns related to the AWR and ATWP as represented in such documents as the ATWP self-study and the draft of the AWR Working Group's Interim Report. The Committee's aim is not to duplicate the good work represented in these and other internal documents but to emphasize and amplify important points that still need to be addressed and to make comments and recommendations that may help ATWP and UVic to fill in gaps where necessary.

Recommendations

1. Transform ATWP into a university-level program or full-fledged Department/School with a university-wide mandate that is responsible for coordinating AWR courses, developing criteria for and reviewing AWR course proposals from different academic units across campus.

2. Prioritize new tenure-track faculty lines to meet high demand for AWR courses and ensure equitable workloads.

3. Develop a leadership succession plan for hiring a new ATWP Director and review the Director's responsibilities with the aim of reallocating some administrative tasks to staff.

4. Hire another support staff so the Administrative Assistant can devote more attention to other administrative and budgetary tasks in support of the ATWP Director.

5. Place more attention and effort on attracting BIPOC faculty, sessionals, and staff.

6. Allocate physical space for an ATWP boardroom where program-related meetings and activity can be held.

7. Change the ATWP name to something that is more concise and appealing for students and update the ATWP's website in terms of both format and content, providing a clear and concise articulation of what good academic writing entails at UVic and in the disciplines, and have actual examples from the professions, students, and faculty.

8. Explore engagement with generative AI tools in ways which benefit student learning and which show curiosity about the role of generative AI tools in students' university and academic writing lives.

9. Set class size caps for writing-intensive courses at maximum 18 to 22 students per section to follow best-practices in the profession and provide greater data and budgetary support for advanced course planning to meet student demand and reduce the over-reliance on enrollment management funds (EMF).

10. Explore potential synergies, partnerships, and collaborations with other writing and communication programs on campus.