

**PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION UNIT QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE – YEAR ELEVEN  
THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 2014**

**Members Present:**

Laura Aboyan, Office of Assessment  
Mary Ann Byrnes, Assistant Dean for Administration, College of Arts and Sciences  
Fred Greer, EDST representative and Chair  
Allison Jacques, Assistant Dean for Assessment  
Zach Kelehear, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs  
Lisa McAlpine, Richland District 2 representative  
Meir Muller, ITE representative

**Program Representatives:**

Hannah Baker, Writing Improvement Network  
Baron Holmes, SC Middle School Initiative  
Jerry Mitchell, SC Geographic Alliance

**I. Call Meeting to order**

Dr. Greer called the meeting to order at 12:34 p.m.

**II. Introductions, Overview of Meeting, and Approval of Minutes**

The committee unanimously approved the minutes.

**III. Review of SC Geographic Alliance, Writing Improvement Network, & SC Middle School Initiative**

Dr. Mitchell provided a brief overview of the SC Geographic Alliance. He has been the coordinator for the past ten years. He briefly summarized his strategic plan for the group. The Geographic Alliance believes that geography is more than just a social science; it is also a physical science. There are five areas listed in the strategic plan: In-service professional development, pre-service professional development, curriculum & materials development, direct student engagement, and business and civic engagement. Dr. Mitchell provided examples for some of the strategic plan areas. The Geographic Alliance produces the Atlas of South Carolina for use in the third and eighth grade curriculum. This is a major revenue stream for the group, as it sold 30,000 copies in its first printing. The Geographic Alliance also works directly with students and teaches them how to incorporate technology into the study of geography. The group does something similar in the community by working with businesses to teach them how to position geospatial technology in workspace development. The Geographic Alliance also has a strong research agenda, and routinely pursues external funding from the NSF, State Department, and the U.S. Department of Education. Dr. Mitchell also serves as the editor for the Journal of Geography.

Dr. Kelehear asked how the Alliance was formed. Dr. Mitchell said that in 1988, National Geographic celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary and wanted to establish a network in each state that would improve

geography literacy. In 1989, the SC Geographic Alliance was formed, with some financial support from National Geographic. Dr. Kelehear asked how many of Dr. Mitchell's colleagues at USC were invested in the Geographic Alliance. Dr. Mitchell said that there are two colleagues he works with regularly. He also pulls in all of his colleagues to lend their expertise as the situation arises. Two of the classes Dr. Mitchell teaches are directly for the College of Education: one for the MAT/MT in Social Studies, and one for Middle Level Social Studies. He has a full-time staff member and between two and four graduate students to oversee the daily operations of the Geographic Alliance. He also makes use of an advisory committee, made up of teacher consultants. The teacher consultants participate in summer training sessions. Upon completion of the training, the consultants facilitate workshops around the state on behalf of the Geographic Alliance.

Dr. Muller asked what needs the Alliance has. Dr. Mitchell said he needs help with assessment. Most of the data he currently has are anecdotal. He has very little quantitative data and would be interested in finding a way to change that.

Dr. Jacques asked Dr. Mitchell to address common misconceptions about the Geographic Alliance. Dr. Mitchell said they need to convince people that geography is about both space and environment, not just memorizing state capitals. He provided an example of his own research with hurricanes. The questions he asks are: What does a geographer bring to that type of research project? How are things like tidal heights, and paved or forested landscapes relevant to the research and how are they measured and mapped? Who is impacted by the path of a hurricane? His goal is to study relationships to better understand the physical and social aspects of geography and how they are intertwined.

USC has the only PhD granting geography unit in South Carolina, and the only geography department in the state.

Ms. Baker gave a brief overview of the Writing Improvement Network (WIN). WIN has been EIA funded since 1988. In 1983, the National Writing Project came to South Carolina to help teachers improve writing. At that time, it was a one-time service that provided a quick workshop for teachers. Ms. Baker proposed a project where WIN would go into schools during the day to help with writing and the teaching of writing. WIN's primary focus is working with at-risk schools, particularly those along the I-95 corridor. WIN provides in-classroom demonstrations for teachers. WIN also goes into schools and assesses classes to better develop an action plan. Assessment has always been relatively easy for WIN because there is a standardized writing test that helps measure the effectiveness of WIN's strategies. Ms. Baker is not sure what will happen as new assessments are implemented in South Carolina. Currently, schools using WIN's services typically score higher on standardized tests than the state average.

WIN works closely with the Midlands Writing Project, coordinated by Dr. Styslinger. There are seven other writing project sites across the state. WIN is completely state-funded; the legislature is the sole financial source for the group. Occasionally WIN participates in other projects with separate budgets. As funding has decreased, WIN is now in a position where it needs to charge schools for services when they are working with consultants. Most of organization's time is spent in the public schools. It does not run courses in the College of Education, though WIN occasionally presents to classes. Workshops are offered for teachers. These are hugely popular. Four workshops this year have needed to be closed because they

received more requests than spaces available. WIN has its own professional learning community that meets once per month. They have been very involved in helping schools get ready to implement Common Core.

Dr. Byrnes asked if there has been a difference in the way teachers interact with students and technology since the formation of WIN. Ms. Baker said yes, technology has opened up the field of research. WIN is careful to teach students to find a reputable site and how to narrow down to research questions. The style of writing has greatly changed, and as a result, so has the way WIN teaches others to analyze text.

Dr. Kelehear asked about gaps to address and areas of concern. Ms. Baker said the biggest challenge she faces is promoting WIN. They used to hold a conference, but since funding has been cut, it has been difficult to reach new teachers and administrators. WIN is also always looking for ways to assess what they do and for ways to do it better.

Dr. Muller asked whether or not WIN's help in preparing students for the Praxis Core exam has been successful. Ms. Baker said it has been. Many students do not know how the test is scored. WIN teaches students how to score their own papers for the Praxis. Dr. Muller asked if the new legislation to have all students reading and writing by third grade will change the direction of what WIN does for schools. Ms. Baker said no, they will continue on their current path.

Ms. McAlpine asked if the contact from schools comes primarily from ELA teachers or from other disciplines, given the writing focus in Common Core. Ms. Baker said that requests usually come from administrators on behalf of the ELA faculty. The needs of other subject areas usually arise during the initial meeting between WIN and the school. Ms. McAlpine asked if WIN would still be able to fulfill its mission if lots of new requests come in from other disciplines. Ms. Baker said yes because WIN will focus the needs of other disciplines through ELA. For example, it would focus on how teachers use writing to teach in other disciplines and increase learning.

Ms. Aboyan asked several questions on behalf of Dr. Douthis. He was specifically interested in how WIN works with high-need schools who do not place a request for professional development. Ms. Baker said that all of WIN's work is based on the district contacting them. Occasionally WIN receives a request for help from the SCDE or a state legislator. Ms. Aboyan asked about the effectiveness of the one-day workshops and whether or not there are any follow-up activities. Ms. Baker said that if the participants are at a WIN school, it is easy to see if there has been improvement. If participants are not part of WIN, the burden is on the participants to follow-up and provide feedback to WIN. Ms. Baker would like to find a better way to track this information. Ms. Aboyan asked if Ms. Baker is satisfied with the improvement rate and if she sets goals for a targeted percent improvement at the outset of a professional development event. Ms. Baker said there is no specific goal setting, though there is always room to improve. In some cases, maintenance is more important than improvement. Ms. Baker also stated that South Carolina is the only state in the country with a writing improvement network.

Dr. Holmes provided a historical context for his initiatives and set the stage for his work by describing his past service to the state through a variety of roles beginning with Governor West. He gave an overview of the SC Middle School Initiative. Dr. Holmes created the organization based on a 1990 grant from the

Carnegie Foundation. Its primary function is to inform state policy and practice at the middle school level by using data and research.

Dr. Jacques asked about the Initiative's three major projects. Dr. Holmes explained that he has contracted with SCMSA to create the Middle Level Teacher Education Initiative to help create middle level programs for certification. He also explained the Middle Grades Data Initiative, which is a longitudinal study, tracking two cohorts of students: one from birth through age 16, and one from birth through age 25. Dr. Holmes concluded by talking about his primary project since joining the Center for Educational Partnerships. He has been working on middle level reading and ultimately proposed the Read to Succeed bill. He has worked with professors around the state who work with reading instruction across all levels to determine which competencies teachers need to have and what they need to be trained in to meet the requirements under law.

#### **IV. Committee Consensus on Programs**

##### **SC Geographic Alliance**

The committee discussed the materials for the SC Geographic Alliance and came to the consensus that the office is performing at the "Exceeds Expectations" level.

##### **Strengths were noted and include:**

- Research based focus
- Community engagement programs
- Solid systems planning and sustainability
- Six-year strategic plan
- Access through resources, connections, and colleagues
- Effective leadership
- Support within departmental unit

##### **Areas for Improvement were noted and include:**

- Development and augmentation of assessment practices
- Creation of a toolkit to effectively conduct necessary assessments
- Development of a publicity plan

##### **Writing Improvement Network**

The committee discussed the materials for the Writing Improvement Network and came to the consensus that the office is performing at the "Meets Expectations" level.

##### **Strengths were noted and include:**

- Longevity and continuous improvement within the office
- Common Core implications, particularly for non-ELA subject areas
- Common Core science standards and research writing preparation for teachers
- Hands-on, school-based commitment
- Practical and realistic strategies for addressing the needs of the state

**Areas for Improvement were noted and include:**

- Publicity plan and website development

**The Committee Further Encourages:**

- More evidence of assessment and hard data

**SC Middle School Initiative**

The committee was unable to determine a final rating, as they were unable to pinpoint the specific mission and strategic plan of the initiative.

**Strengths of the Program were noted and include:**

- Passion and commitment of leadership
- Connections throughout the state and bringing resources together
- Thinking about who to involve before making decisions
- Longitudinal study and data from Ohio State – Who owns this data?

**Areas for Improvement were noted and include:**

- General streamlining of the mission, perhaps through the creation of an executive summary
- Brief description of the mission
- At times difficult to determine relationship between Middle Level and reading

**The Committee Further Encourages:**

- Development of a clear mission statement to pinpoint exactly what the strategic plan is
- Clear and concise explanation of how the Middle School Initiative fits into the CEP.
- Clearly stated goals will lead to clear assessments
- Rich data collection – Is there a plan for sharing and/or collaborating with others?

**V. Schedule for Future Meetings**

- *Programs to Review Spring 2013*
  - SUPCE, Grants & Contract, and Conferences – May 8, 2014
- *Programs to Reschedule*
  - *Office of Assessment*
  - *Office of Instructional Support & Information Technology*

**VI. Other Business**

Dr. Greer adjourned the meeting at 2:26 p.m.