University of Colorado **Boulder**

2025 Program Review

Program for Writing and Rhetoric

Academic Review and Planning

Advisory Committee Report

Approved _Ann Stevens_ 1/12/2026

Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs | Date

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Process Overview

The Academic Review and Planning Advisory Committee (ARPAC) review of the Program for Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) was conducted in accordance with the 2025 program review guidelines. The degree program report and goal setting exercise were prepared and submitted by the unit. An external review committee (ERC), consisting of two experts from outside of the University of Colorado Boulder, engaged in a virtual visit and submitted a report based upon review of relevant documents and interviews with faculty, staff, and student unit members and university administrators. ARPAC staff, employing web conferencing tools, facilitated the external review as a remote visit over March 17 and 18, 2025. The ARPAC unit liaisons submitted a summary of findings derived from the goal setting exercise. ARPAC reviewed and considered these materials, met with the director, and wrote this report.

Past Reviews

PWR was previously reviewed by ARPAC in 2016. In that review, ARPAC's recommendations focused on several different issues, primarily (1) the need to balance the number of temporary lecturer appointments with the number of tenured/tenure-track (TTT) faculty and to include graduate part-time instructors (GPTIs) in the place of temporary adjunct lecturer faculty; (2) the need to increase faculty diversity; (3) developing inter-unit collaboration for PWR programs—namely, Writing in the Disciplines (WID) and Writing across the College (WAC)—across the colleges and schools; and (4) focusing on establishing the viability of the programs of WID and WAC and stabilizing the Writing Center budget before pursuing departmental status.

Follow-up responses from the unit dating to 2020 and information provided by the PWR website demonstrate that unit made progress on the first goal, rebalancing toward less reliance on temporary lecturer appointments, primarily through converting many lecturer lines to teaching professor positions. The unit also argued in its responses, however, that the flexibility that comes from temporary lecturers is helpful in setting class schedules when it is not entirely clear how much enrollment PWR classes will garner.

With regard to the second goal, increased diversity, PWR seems to have made progress; however, their current 2025 goal setting exercise points out that they have lost 10 teaching professors in the last year, including 2 faculty of color, so it is not clear that any lasting progress was made on this front. ARPAC would request more precise data from the unit on this score.

With regard to the third goal, inter-unit collaboration, PWR teaches a substantial number of courses across different units and has been actively developing its curriculum specifically towards teaching courses for other units, and specifically for the College of Communication, Media, Design and Information (CMDI), as noted in their 2020 follow-up response. (Please note that CMDI was known as the College of Media, Communication and Information [CMCI] until mid-2025 and that PWR's 2020 response uses that name.)

Regarding the element of the fourth goal that has to do with tabling the pursuit of departmental status, PWR stated in their follow-up responses that the unit "vehemently disagrees with this recommendation." Another part of the fourth goal was accomplished by the Division of Academic Affairs, which took over the funding of the Writing Center and assigned supervision to the Office of Undergraduate Education.

Unit Analysis

The campus' standardized description of the Program for Writing and Rhetoric is available on the website of the Office of Data & Analytics (D&A) at https://www.colorado.edu/oda/institutional-research/institutional-level-data/information-department/academic-review-and-planning. D&A updates the profile annually in the fall semester. This report cites data posted in October 2024, reflecting the state of the PWR as of the academic year (AY) 2024-2025.

Teaching and Learning Excellence and Assessment

The Program for Writing and Rhetoric's primary focus is on writing classes that fulfill the Arts & Sciences and other college/school requirements for their general education or core curriculum. PWR does not offer a major; it does offer a Writing Certificate. The unit also offers a minor in Writing and Public Engagement in collaboration with the Department of English and a micro-credential in Applied Public Writing.

The unit defines its teaching mission in relation to its service mission for advancing student writing opportunities across the campus and the college. Historically, the unit has been tied to the Department of English, and all but one of the TTT faculty rostered in PWR have their tenure home in English.

Beyond its current offerings, the program aims to develop three new interdisciplinary curricular initiatives that integrate rhetorical education and applied public writing with various disciplinary domains. It also plans to launch a Writing and Rhetoric Fellows Program to support mentorship and experiential learning in writing instruction. In collaboration with other campus units, the program intends to develop technical and professional writing courses that meet students' academic and professional needs. These course offerings will need to be clarified with regard to which units on campus they will serve, as well as with regard to how these courses will affect the targeted campus units' own curricula. PWR should supply this information going forward. Finally, PWR seeks to continue and expand its community-engaged programming, such as the Prison Writing Consultant Program.

Research, Scholarly, and/or Creative Work Excellence

The ERC commends the program's record of scholarly productivity and its integration of research with teaching and community engagement, emphasizing that PWR faculty "are publishing in some of the field's top journals." ARPAC notes that expectations outlined by the ERC for publication in PWR as a field may not be in alignment with other Humanities expectations, given the generally high load of teaching in the discipline of writing and rhetoric historically as a service department not just at CU Boulder, but across the country. In addition, writing and rhetoric spans humanities and social sciences (specifically, communication) fields, and thus journal articles may have a higher status than in the book-driven humanities disciplines.

While most of the publications from the unit are authored by TTT faculty, a few of the publications in the last two years have been authored by teaching-track faculty. On its website, PWR itself lists 3 journal articles, 1 jointly authored journal article, and 1 chapter published in 2024 from 4 faculty; four of these publications are from TTT faculty and 1 from an associate teaching professor. From 2023, the website lists 1 jointly authored book and 1 single authored book, plus 5 journal articles and 3 chapters.

As early as the 2009 ARPAC review, PWR cited the National Research Council's description of the field as an "emerging discipline" of its own. The status of writing and rhetoric studies as an independent discipline remains an issue for the department and for CU Boulder as a whole. The 2025 ERC emphasizes that the scholarly expertise within PWR represents a valuable yet underutilized resource for both the college and the university and also observes that there remains a lack of institutional support and recognition for the program's scholarly contributions: "we also came away from our meetings concerned by the fact that neither the college leadership nor the ARPAC liaisons we spoke with seemed clear that rhetoric and writing studies is itself a transdisciplinary scholarly field devoted to the history, theory, and analysis of the variously enculturated material and discursive practices that constitute our world." PWR does not list faculty engagement with the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), one of the world's largest professional organizations for researching and teaching composition, which would be a logical home for growing this transdisciplinary field.

PWR faculty echo some of the ERC's concerns, noting that the discipline of rhetoric and composition/writing studies employs a range of theories and practices to address diverse contemporary issues and knowledge domains. However, they emphasize that the discipline—represented on the CU Boulder campus by the PWR—has long experienced what they describe as "disciplinary discrimination." Specifically, the program has been denied the opportunity to offer a major. ARPAC notes, however, that PWR is not exceptional in this regard; most other peer universities do not offer a separate major in writing and rhetoric across the country in not offering a separate major (as opposed to, say, a writing and rhetoric track within another major such as English or communication). ARPAC also notes that several departments at CU Boulder include more than one (related) discipline and that this is not necessarily a cause for creating a new department. ARPAC sent a list of clarifying questions for the discovery summary process that would help to analyze these issues but did not receive responses to the questions sent.

Regarding the idea of PWR as an "emerging" and "transdisciplinary scholarly field", it may be worth possibly drawing insights as PWR goes forward from CMDI, which as a college has had also to navigate issues of transdisciplinarity—not in a comparative way, since a program is different from a college, but simply to help think through various processes. This possible exercise seems pertinent as well insofar as PWR noted in its follow-up response in 2020 that it has taken on all writing courses for CMDI.

According to the PWR goal setting exercise, faculty research spans areas such as data literacy, public and community engagement, writing pedagogy, and the intersection of rhetoric with digital and scientific communication. The unit also notes that since the last review, faculty have participated in the externally funded project *Data Advocacy for All*, a $300,000 grant supported by one tenure-track faculty member, one teaching professor, and a Writing, Rhetoric, Information, Technology, and Ecology (WRITE) Lab affiliate, with the grant's principal investigator (PI) in the Department of Mathematics, as well as in the National Science Foundation (NSF)-funded project *Integrating Content and Skills from the Humanities into Data Science Education*. Faculty have also secured internal grants such as Public and Community Engaged Scholarship Awards.

Also, since the last ARPAC review, the program has established the WRITE Lab (not to be confused with the Writing Center), a project designed to bring together PWR faculty of different ranks, both TTT faculty and teaching-track faculty, to offer feedback on writing projects and help bring them to publication. The unit has noted that the WRITE Lab has unfortunately and unexpectedly functioned as well to create division between TTT faculty and teaching faculty within

PWR. The unit proposes to reconfigure the WRITE Lab to be more inclusive of teaching faculty and to use the WRITE Lab as a hub to develop events, programming, and grant applications; this reconfiguration would include the appointment of a director from within PWR faculty ranks.

Hiring and Mentoring (Faculty, Staff, Postdoctoral Fellows)

According to the D&A profile for AY 2024-2025, faculty personnel in PWR consisted of 6 TTT faculty members (3 associate professors and 3 assistant professors). The unit has 15 assistant teaching professors, 15 associate teaching professors, 15 lecturers, and 3 GPTIs. In the past couple of years, PWR has had some success in mentoring lecturer rank faculty and with obtaining support from the dean of the Division of Arts and Humanities to help shift lecturers to teaching professor rank. At the same time, however, recent retirements among teaching faculty have also meant that unit has no teaching faculty at the full professor rank.

PWR has a unique faculty composition compared to other units on campus, with a low ratio of tenure-track to teaching-track faculty. The problems arising from this imbalance appear to have contributed to the problems with the WRITE Lab, as noted above; however, they also appear to have been somewhat mitigated with the university's increased focus on converting lecturer lines to teaching professor lines.

Nevertheless, hiring and retention for PWR have been persistent challenges that can be traced back at least as far as the 2009 ARPAC review. Factors such as economic downturns and the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to budget deficits, which limited the program's ability to hire faculty and to expand TTT lines. The ERC notes that comparatively low salaries and the high cost of living in Boulder, combined with high teaching loads—typically four three-credit courses per semester for teaching-track faculty and lecturers except when a teaching-track faculty member has increased service commitments—have created an environment of low morale within the unit. The ERC was not clear on whether this affects both TTT faculty and teaching faculty, but ARPAC has determined that these factors are concerns in regard only to teaching faculty and lecturers rather than TTT faculty. Moreover, frequent changes in leadership have resulted in the loss of institutional knowledge, while retirements and departures have further strained the program.

PWR has developed a strategic hiring plan to address current faculty gaps and strengthen its research and teaching capacity. PWR proposes to hire tenure-track and/or teaching professor teams in key areas, including Technical and Professional Writing, Science Writing and Environmental Rhetorics—with an emphasis on Critical Science Studies—Cultural Rhetorics, and Public/Engaged Humanities. Additionally, the program aims to continue to balance its reliance on lecturers, given that CU Boulder is revising its policy on non-tenure track faculty to align with University of Colorado APS 5060, which states that lecturers must be <50% full time. The program lists as one of its goals creating further pathways for these lecturers to transition into full-time teaching-track faculty positions, enhancing continuity, institutional knowledge, and the program's long-term stability.

Student Success and Mentoring (Undergraduate and Graduate Students)

Given that the program does not have a major, it is difficult to measure student success and mentoring. However, the unit notes that students receive extensive and substantive feedback on

writing and multimedia projects—approximately 25 pages per student per semester in lower-division courses and 30 pages per student per semester in upper-division courses. Students also participate in one-on-one conferences with instructors and instructor-led peer writing groups, and receive ongoing mentorship supporting belonging, safety, and engagement with diverse perspectives. The small course size, 19 students, both makes this amount of feedback possible and may necessitate keeping classes small.

PWR briefly mentioned goals for hiring faculty with expertise in artificial intelligence (AI); however, given the rapid growth of AI use, particularly for undergraduate writing classes, setting up a model for addressing AI use in ways that will not stymie student learning in writing seems to be crucial for PWR, especially given recent research suggesting that AI use causes student capacity for writing and reasoning to diminish. The small size of PWR classes, limited to 19 students, suggests that students can benefit from individualized attention, rigorous writing instruction, and inclusive, community-oriented classrooms. However, given the rapid increase of use of AI by students for their writing assignments, it may make sense to set up a plan for both assessing AI use in work that students hand in and addressing ways of helping students to gain the basics for writing apart from using AI tools. ARPAC urges PWR to take a lead on this looming challenge in a way that can leverage its standing model of student interaction in small classes to implement policies in this area.

According to the unit, PWR plans to develop mentoring programs for students enrolled in the Interdisciplinary Writing Certificate, the minor in Writing and Public Engagement, and the micro-credential in Applied Public Writing. These efforts would include professional development for faculty advisors, expansion of staff advising support, and single-credit self-paced capstone courses such as WRTG 4910: Portfolio Curation, which helps students reflect on their learning and connect it to professional and public futures. ARPAC requested additional information from PWR regarding details of these various programs but did not receive responses.

PWR has also listed that its planned focuses for improving student success include expanding faculty capacity for advising, hiring dedicated staff advisors, and enhancing cohort-based learning opportunities to further support retention, particularly for students of color.

Inclusivity and Unit Culture

In February 2022, a collaborative group met and identified the following [five goals to advance diversity, equity and inclusion](#) at CU Boulder: (1) employee skills and development; (2) student achievement outcomes; (3) community building; (4) employee recruitment outcomes; and (5) preparing students to participate in a diverse democracy.

PWR has noted that exit interviews indicate that its teaching faculty of color leave CU Boulder because the students taking PWR classes lack sufficient diversity, which leads teaching faculty of color to lack a sense of community belonging. To address this, the unit proposes offering in-service activities and workshops focused on belonging. They also propose offering courses that would attract a more diverse student body to their classes. A perhaps more urgent and concrete action would be to address the fact that internal climate surveys have helped identify issues in culture, workload, and perceptions of power; PWR flagged these issues in its goal setting exercise and intends to address them.

PWR also proposes to help with unit climate issues by advocating for equitable pay and flexible teaching loads, providing additional course development grants, and implementing more transparent procedures and supports. The unit proposes to continue to measure internal climate

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through surveys, exit interviews, and ongoing feedback, with the goal of creating a thriving, equitable, and inclusive environment for faculty, staff, and students.

Unit Planning and Governance Structures and Processes

PWR's goals include redefining its identity to better meet current and future needs by creating transparent and equitable processes for merit, salary, and workload, supporting faculty development, and preserving institutional knowledge. For faculty, the unit hopes to attract and retain individuals whose teaching and research advance the program's disciplinary and interdisciplinary goals. For staff, the unit seeks clearly defined roles and processes to support smooth operations and effective student and faculty support.

The unit has taken several steps to improve governance, planning, and faculty support. It has begun streamlining the merit process for teaching-track faculty by reducing the number of required documents and clarifying evaluation criteria. As mentioned above, exit surveys have been implemented to identify key retention challenges, particularly those related to teaching load and compensation. Existing efforts also include advocating for higher salaries, offering summer course development grants funded through gift funds, and adjusting teaching schedules where possible to improve work-life balance. The unit also established a revised process to meet the reporting requirements for ARPAC and to guide program planning, review, and assessment. Many of these new processes will be part of the portfolio of a new unit-level position, the incoming Academic Service Director, set for implementation in 2026. In addition, the unit is compiling a comprehensive set of policy documents: onboarding manuals for faculty, staff, and administrators; revised curricular frameworks; and a new assessment model for learning outcomes, assigning responsibilities to relevant committees to preserve institutional knowledge.

Overall, ARPAC believes that the unit's vision for transparent, equitable governance is promising, particularly its focus on merit simplification, salary equity, and retention, though further improvements could include formalizing teaching-track faculty retention processes at the college level, documenting historical procedures, and clarifying policies and standards across faculty and staff roles.

Recommendations

The members of the Academic Review and Planning Advisory Committee address the following recommendations to the Program for Writing and Rhetoric and to the offices of responsible administrators:

To the Unit:

1. As recommended in the 2016 ARPAC report, and in light of the fact that TTT faculty must be aligned with a disciplinary structure as they work towards promotion, set aside discussion of becoming a stand-alone department and coordinate with the dean's findings in terms of an optimal institutional structure for PWR.

2. Study the implications of AI use in writing courses, outline a model for permissible AI use in relation to both students and faculty, and implement best practices for teaching writing in the age of AI that are consistent across PWR courses, particularly (but not exclusively) for the unit's "digital" offerings.

3. Outline a proposal to address PWR's capacity to teach upper division classes in fields that require a field-specific and discipline-specific knowledge basis.

4. Provide support for teaching-track faculty to advance their academic development through opportunities to present and publish in the fields of composition and rhetoric studies and to contribute to national dialogues on innovative teaching and learning practices.

5. Develop a proposal to address historical salary compression for teaching-track faculty.

6. Continue exit surveys of departing faculty to monitor retention and workload challenges.

7. Carry out plans to reconfigure the WRITE LAB:
    a. Ensure the WRITE Lab is more inclusive of teaching faculty so as to improve the faculty relationships between the TTT and teaching-track faculty who participate.
    b. Use the WRITE Lab as a hub to develop grant applications as a way of encouraging the participation of more members of the PWR unit.

8. Devise a method to measure efforts to create inclusive classrooms that foster a sense of belonging for students and faculty of color.

9. Streamline and clarify annual merit and reappointment evaluation processes for teaching-track faculty.

10. To increase transparency and to alleviate problems with retention of institutional knowledge for the unit, make policy, procedural, and curricular planning documents accessible and available to all departmental faculty and staff, including: 1) bylaws; 2) onboarding manuals for faculty, staff, and administrators; and 3) revised curricular frameworks.

To the Dean of the Arts and Humanities:

11. Support PWR in reconfiguring their institutional structure in a way that supports the research program of TTT faculty, the professional success of teaching faculty, and the teaching of writing to undergraduate students.

12. Explore creating shared administrative support services for certain key functions for which individual units, especially smaller units, may not have staff personnel, e.g., graduate student administrative support, event support, budget and finance support, etc.

13. Support PWR in developing a plan to address PWR's capacity to teach upper division classes in fields that require a field-specific and discipline-specific knowledge basis.

14. Collaborate with the other Deans of Division and the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences to develop a plan to address workload disparities for teaching-track faculty.

15. Continue efforts to advocate for an Arts & Humanities budget process that accounts for units' high share of student credit hours (SCH) from non-majors and develop a plan to robustly account for and reward these SCH, recognizing units' significant educational contributions. Under the current budget model, there are concerns that PWR will not be allocated appropriate resources for the courses taught/students served.

16. Emphasize and support the important role that PWR—and the humanities disciplines as a whole—play in CU Boulder's mission when communicating and advocating to university administration, the local community, and the state of Colorado, including in central campus (SRC) communications and storytelling.

To the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences:

17. In collaboration with the Deans of Division, develop a plan to address workload disparities for teaching-track faculty.

To the Provost:

18. Encourage university-wide adoption of consistent climate and exit survey tools to monitor unit-level culture and inclusivity and ensure actionable follow-up on identified issues.

19. Organize a cross-campus discussion to determine the structural relationship between upper-division writing classes across campus departments and PWR upper-division division writing classes.

20. Emphasize and support the important role that PWR—and the humanities disciplines as a whole—play in CU Boulder's mission when communicating and advocating to university administration, the local community, and the state of Colorado, including in central campus (SRC) communications and storytelling.

Required Follow-up

The director of the Program for Writing and Rhetoric shall submit two follow-up reports—one due on the first of April 2027 and one due on the first of April 2029. The follow-up reports shall focus on the implementation of the recommendations from ARPAC detailed herein. The dean of Arts and Humanities and the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, as well as the provost and other relevant central campus leadership will also respond to all outstanding matters under their purview arising from this review year's recommendations. The dean of Arts and Humanities and the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences will submit one follow-up report due on May 1, 2028, while the provost and relevant central campus leaders will submit one follow-up report due on June 1, 2030.

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