

UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

Department of  
Writing and Rhetoric

# STRATEGIC PLAN



THE UNIVERSITY of  
**MISSISSIPPI**  
WRITING AND RHETORIC

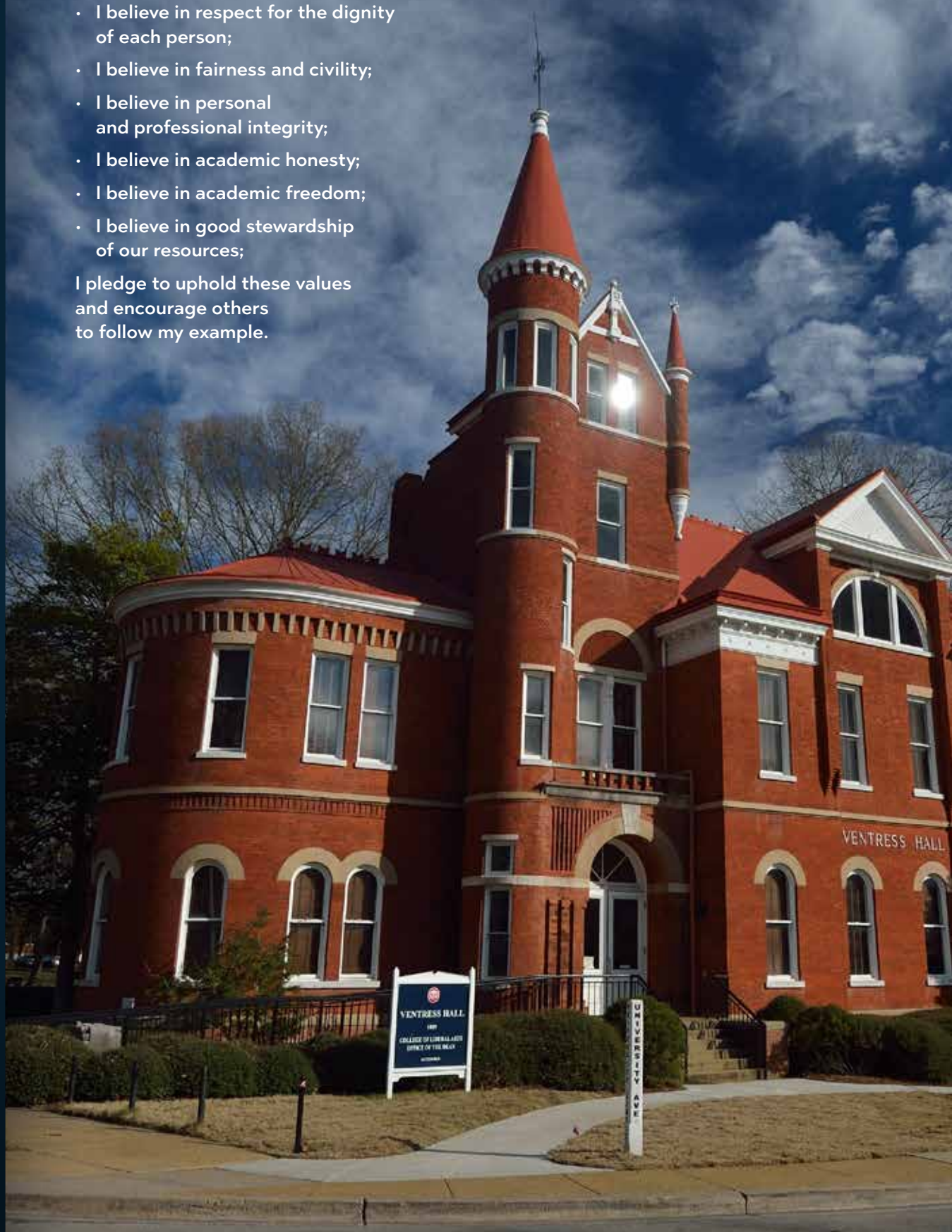
**2018  
2022**

# The University of Mississippi Creed

The University of Mississippi is a community of learning dedicated to nurturing excellence in intellectual inquiry and personal character in an open and diverse environment. As a voluntary member of this community:

- I believe in respect for the dignity of each person;
- I believe in fairness and civility;
- I believe in personal and professional integrity;
- I believe in academic honesty;
- I believe in academic freedom;
- I believe in good stewardship of our resources;

I pledge to uphold these values and encourage others to follow my example.



### MISSION & VISION

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The Department of Writing and Rhetoric (DWR) provides student-centered, inquiry-based instruction and support to advance effective, responsible thinking, writing, and speaking within and beyond the University of Mississippi.

The DWR leads the university in creating and sustaining a diverse, inclusive culture of effective writers and speakers.

### OVERVIEW

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The Department of Writing and Rhetoric (DWR) is the institutional home of first-year writing, speech communication, the writing centers, and a professional writing minor at the University of Mississippi. Officially classified as a department in 2014, the DWR continues to expand with new upper-division course offerings, the addition of faculty colleagues, and a growing writing and speech curriculum.

# STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

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In fall 2017, an internal task force was formed in the DWR to study the department, collect information from faculty and staff, and develop a strategic plan for the next five years. Surveys were distributed to faculty and staff, and focus groups were conducted to collect feedback on perceptions of our collective mission, vision, culture, and goals. After gathering feedback from a majority of faculty and staff, the task force met weekly during the 2017-18 academic year to discuss responses and develop them into achievable objectives. Nineteen members of the department served on the strategic planning task force, which was open to any and all volunteers among DWR faculty and staff. The group talked openly, honestly, and at great length about problems, existing strengths, and future opportunities. Along the way, we drafted the mission and vision statement and the detailed list of objectives and action items that comprise much of this strategic plan. Collective writing can be challenging, but the process was productive and enlightening.

Throughout the year, the strategic planning task force presented monthly updates to the full faculty of the DWR. In the late fall, after weeks of workshops, the task force presented the mission and vision statement. At the end of the following spring semester, the task force presented the list of objectives and action items. During summer 2018, DWR



faculty members Claire Mischker and Jenny Jackson used these primary documents, department resources, and the detailed minutes of the task force's many meetings to write the following plan.

The faculty and staff of the DWR have poured much energy and thought into this planning process. We hope the following document will be used in the coming years 1) to protect and maintain our department's positive culture of teaching and learning, and 2) to launch our department into a successful and innovative future. To that end, this plan begins with a categorized overview of our history



and current strengths. Although not comprehensive, this overview does capture the health and vitality of the department. As we seek improvements, we wish to maintain and build upon current strengths. After this categorized overview, the strategic plan turns to the future, ending with the aforementioned list of objectives and goals. The strategic planning task force worked very hard to turn dozens of hours of productive discussions into this concise but ambitious list of DWR priorities.

During our strategic planning process, we spoke often about our students. As a department, we are united in our commitment to them. As we implement the recommendations of the following plan, we will strive to maintain this focus and priority. If an action will help our students improve as speakers or writers, we will pursue it. If not, we will reconsider. This single criterion has guided our planning and is consistent with our history and values. Students come first in the DWR.



## INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY

The DWR began as the Center for Writing and Rhetoric (CWR) in 2009 as an outcome of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which focused on improving student writing. Dr. Robert Cummings was the first director of the CWR and was supported by one full-time administrative staff member (Glenn Schove), an associate director (Alice Myatt), and four core faculty members (including current faculty members Karen Forgette, Guy Krueger, and Wendy Goldberg). Throughout the 2010-11 academic year, the core instructors led committees to revise first-year composition courses, including WRIT 100, 101, 102 and LIBA 102. Over the next two years, the CWR established WRIT 250, a revision of ENGL 250, and completed its mission to incorporate QEP outcomes into all composition courses. In 2013, speech faculty joined the department. In 2017, an assistant professor of speech was hired, and in 2018, a lecturer of speech was added to the core faculty. As the CWR matured beyond the 2009 QEP, it met and surpassed the goals envisioned in that plan and has continued to thrive.

On July 1, 2014, the CWR officially transitioned to the Department of Writing and Rhetoric and moved to its current home in Lamar Hall. In 2015, the minor in professional writing was first offered to UM students along with its accompanying upper-division courses. Over these years, the DWR also reinvigorated the university writing center on the Oxford campus, developed a flourishing graduate writing



center, and partnered with UM Outreach to develop successful writing centers at the Southaven and Tupelo campuses.

The DWR is now one of the largest departments in the College of Liberal Arts and at the University of Mississippi. During 2017-18, the DWR was home to 44 full-time instructors and lecturers, 20 part-time or adjunct instructors, and three full-time tenure-track or tenured

professors. Approximately 20 graduate students teach DWR classes and work in the writing centers during any given year. Our faculty teaches writing, speech, and rhetoric and offered 23,856 student credit hours during the 2017-18 academic year. Many of our faculty have administrative responsibilities that include developing curriculum and directing UM's writing centers.



## INNOVATIONS

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The DWR has a longstanding commitment to innovative teaching and outreach, which is exemplified by the development and hosting of Transitioning to College Writing (TCW), an annual symposium that brings together middle school, high school, and two- and four-year college writing teachers to share best practices in writing pedagogy.



The DWR has also been a state and national leader in the Open Educational Resources (OER) movement. Bob Cummings, former chair, and Stephen Monroe, current chair, have a grant from the Hewlett Foundation to promote the use of OER at community colleges and universities across Mississippi. Called Z-Degree Mississippi, this program has resulted in student textbook savings of more than \$7 million.

Many DWR faculty have incorporated OER and other technology into their courses, such as learning modules for Writing 100 and 101, undertaken in partnership with Lumen Learning of Portland, to be piloted at full scale in fall 2018. Writing 250 faculty have also developed OER, which have been piloted over 2017-2018. This work is supported by grant funding from the Gates Foundation and the Association of Public Land Grant Universities through UM's PLATO project. This is another grant program with roots in the DWR. Such innovative efforts build on a departmental culture that encourages novel approaches and the strategic use of technology. Other examples include the Commonplace Book, an e-portfolio



method developed within the department, and the many multimodal assignments that faculty has incorporated across DWR curriculum.

We are a department that values innovation and experimentation in the classroom, and new pilots are on the horizon that stem from our strategic planning efforts. For example, this fall the speech faculty will begin working with new classroom recording devices to encourage reflection in SPCH 102. Funding for that technology is being provided by the College of Liberal Arts and the Office of the Provost. In another pilot project, DWR teachers of writing and speech are working with faculty from across the college to design a small seminar to improve the critical-thinking skills of first-year students. This redesign of LIBA 102 will contribute to UM's upcoming Quality Enhancement Plan and will be piloted for Provost Scholars during fall 2018. In other words, our strategic planning has already informed decisions and actions. Moving forward, we seek to continue our tradition of innovation.

## DEPARTMENT STRENGTH

The DWR has developed two classes as part of the interdisciplinary digital media studies minor: WRIT 350: Digital Writing and WRIT 415: Digital Rhetoric.

The professional writing minor includes upper-level classes such as WRIT 300: Foundations of Technical and Professional Writing and WRIT 410: Grant Writing.

In the DWR, NTT faculty members act as core faculty for different DWR courses, and NTT faculty can and do lead a number of curriculum committees.



## EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

Previous recipients  
of the X.A. Kramer, Jr.  
Outstanding Teacher  
Award include:

2016: Gretchen Bunde

2015: Dave Miller

2014: Andrew Davis

2013: Jane Meek

2012: Mary Brooks Tyler

## DEVOTION TO STUDENTS

The DWR's first and foremost aim is to aid and serve students through our writing and speech classes. Our first-year courses prepare students to write and communicate in college by focusing on writing and speech as processes for a variety of contexts and audiences; our intermediate courses cultivate those skills; and our upper-division courses refine and polish rhetorical strategies as students prepare for professional experience.

Our courses also help students develop information literacy, awareness and application of conventions, and exploration and argumentation skills, with further emphasis on research and critical thinking as they advance through our catalog. Concurrently, we recognize and embrace the diversity of our student body. Many students arrive in our classrooms well prepared for the challenge of college, but some do not. In the DWR, we embrace and

celebrate this opportunity to provide effective instruction to all students.

The DWR offers courses through the Foundations for Academic Success Track (FASTrack), which is a first-year learning community established by the College of Liberal Arts that helps students make a successful transition from high school to college. In DWR FASTrack courses, students benefit from smaller and enhanced classes, individualized conferencing, and a community of supportive peers. Each year, the program serves some 400 first-year students, including nearly 200 Pell-eligible students.

The DWR also offers LIBA 102, a seminar taught by faculty and staff across disciplines. The appeal of this first-year seminar lies in both the variety of topics offered, usually based on the specialties of the discrete faculty, and the option for the class to substitute for WRIT 102. The DWR also offers four speech courses from the 100

to 300 level that focus on public speaking, business/professional communications, the art of interviewing, intercollegiate debate, and collaborative communication.

To continue meeting students' academic and eventual professional needs, the DWR offers a minor in professional writing and serves as the administrative home for the minor in digital media studies. The minor in professional writing prepares students to become effective written, spoken, visual, and electronic communicators in a variety of digital, disciplinary, and workplace environments. Special emphasis is given to navigating the terrain of electronic writing environments and social media through portfolio projects, allowing students to develop lifelong communication practices. Students take courses in rhetoric and digital studies, and the entirety of the minor is offered and can be completed online, a project completed by DWR faculty with grant funding from the College of Liberal Arts.

In collaboration with engineering, art, and journalism, the minor in digital media studies is an interdisciplinary minor that combines computer science, digital arts, professional writing, digital marketing, digital humanities, and other digital topics. The minor provides a theory-based introduction to the digital studies field, several skill-based core classes, upper-division electives, and a team project.

One of the DWR's most successful and prominent student services is our network of writing centers that provide free writing consultation to all UM students. Our four writing centers — Oxford, Graduate, DeSoto, and Tupelo — offer both face-to-face and online appointments six days a week. The writing centers also offer other services, including faculty consultations, workshops, orientations, and writing groups. The DWR also administers mobile writing centers across the main campus in the J.D. Williams Library, the FedEx



Center, and Burns Hall. In the 2017-18 academic year, 2,090 new students registered with the writing centers, and nearly 5,000 appointments were held, including face-to-face, online, and correspondence options.

The DWR recognizes student achievement in first-year composition through the annual Cynthia Kreiser Outstanding Freshman Writing award, available through the generosity of the Kreiser family. DWR faculty nominates first-year students based on their exceptional work in class, and an awards committee reviews nominations to choose the recipient.



The DWR consistently offers Brown Bag professional development lunches that highlight different pedagogical approaches or discussions surrounding writing and rhetoric; these topics include OER, first-year writing groups, APA format, and Lumen.



## CULTURE: FACULTY & STAFF

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The department's administrative staff consists of six core instructors who chair committees regarding curricula, which include FASTrack, WRIT 100, 101, 102, & 250, speech, and writing enrichment. There are also four writing center directors, an instructional design specialist, an assessment coordinator, and two administrative staff members. The number of DWR instructors has grown exponentially since the department was first established and now consists of approximately 80 faculty members and graduate instructors. Since being established in the DWR, the writing centers have also grown in both number, from one to four, and in staff, from one full-time staff member with







four graduate tutors to four full-time staff members with more than 50 undergraduate and graduate consultants. Three additional tenure-track lines have been established since our inception, and we hope for further investment in tenure-track lines in the future.

Within the DWR, we value all faculty, and we define that term more broadly than some departments. For example, full-time and part-time faculty attend department faculty meetings and have voting privileges. Another example of our egalitarian spirit is the grassroots movement begun by Sarah Wilson, alongside many DWR and university colleagues, to win representation on the Faculty Senate for UM's non-tenure track (NTT) faculty. We are proud that this movement began in the DWR.

Established in 1986 by Bae Magruder in memory of X.A. Kramer, Jr., the Kramer Outstanding Teaching Award is presented annually to a student-nominated DWR instructor. Past recipients of this award were recognized as demonstrating the



following: building students' confidence and helping students advance in their writing abilities, encouraging active learning and critical thinking, providing helpful feedback about writing and rhetoric, and fostering a sense of community and civic responsibility.

DWR faculty members have also been recognized through college and campuswide teaching awards. Recent examples include Karen Forgette, who was named Liberal Arts Outstanding Instructor of the Year in 2015, and Marc Watkins, who has received several awards for his innovative online teaching.

# PARTNERSHIPS

The DWR has collaborated with various departments, centers, and schools to promote student writing and speaking. These include ongoing partnerships with the School of Education, the School of Accountancy, the School of Engineering, the Office of Outreach, the Southern Foodways Alliance, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, and the Center for Student Success and First-Year Experience. Through our Writing Enriched Curriculum program, led by Angela Green, the DWR provides professional development and support to graduate instructors from a variety of disciplines and to faculty wishing to incorporate writing into their courses. The faculty seed grant program, for example, continues to be popular and successful.

The DWR is the grateful recipient of both the McCullouch-Greer



Endowment and the Faculty Position Fund to Advance Writing as a Civic Responsibility. Established by Reba and Lance Greer, these contributions encourage students to engage with hypothesis-based rhetoric and promote the civic responsibility of writing. The generosity of the Greer family has enabled the DWR to hire a new faculty member who will teach, research, and promote community writing.





## GROWTH & THE FUTURE

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Since its inception, the DWR has employed progressive strategies to improve the quality of our offerings, instruction, and services. Through our strategic planning process, we have reflected on this substantial progress and have carefully considered our priorities for the coming five years. We have distilled many months of productive discussions into the following list of objectives and action items.

### Objectives and Action Items

#### Objective:

#### Support Students in their Development as Writers and Speakers

The Department of Writing and Rhetoric administers and teaches the first-year writing and speech sequences to students at the University of Mississippi, and, in doing so, it functions as a foundation for incoming UM students. This unique position affords the department the opportunity to prepare students for writing and speaking experiences in upper-division writing, speech, and rhetoric classes within the department as well as across disciplines.

#### Action Items

- Create a speaking center
- Strengthen and promote our writing centers
- Develop new speech, writing, and rhetoric courses
- Expand the population of students served by DWR courses
- Revise LIBA 102 and increase student enrollments
- Redevelop WRIT 101 online as an innovative, high-contact course
- Enhance support for underprepared, international, and transfer students
- Create co-curricular learning opportunities for students in our courses

#### Measures of Success

- Establishment of speaking center and assessment of participation
- Number of students utilizing writing center services
- Number of students enrolled in and served by DWR courses
- Amount of co-curricular learning opportunities

## Objective:

### Strengthen the Department and Its Place within the University

The Department of Writing and Rhetoric continues to thrive, both as a department and within its place in the university, with the ongoing enrollment of students within the major and minor and by continuing to aim to meet UM's academic needs.

## Action Items

- Study and refine the minor
- Develop the major/B.A. degree
- Expand teacher-controlled assessment processes
- Create online course enrichment and review process
- Streamline DWR operations and clarify policies
- Develop timeline and strategies to further incorporate speech into the department
- Create additional leadership opportunities for NTT faculty
- Correct faculty title inconsistency on the web and in UM systems

## Measures of Success

- Development of programs and degrees
- Number of teacher-controlled assessment processes
- Development of online course enrichment and review process
- Efficiency of DWR operations and policy clarity
- Number and variety of leadership opportunities for NTT faculty
- Consistency of faculty titles on the web and UM systems





### Objective:

#### Support Faculty and Staff Development and Promote Teaching Excellence

The Department of Writing and Rhetoric consistently encourages professional development of its faculty and staff. Continuing this encouragement, as well as amplifying the opportunity for development and teaching excellence through a broad range of opportunities, is a priority in the DWR.

### Action Items

- Recruit and retain a diverse faculty and staff
- Rotate assignments so that all faculty regularly teach lower-division courses
- Establish procedure for reporting and addressing unprofessional behavior
- Pursue increases to faculty/staff compensation: assess workloads and equity
- Create opportunities for collaboration between speech and writing faculty
- Develop varied approaches to professional development
- Articulate the DWR balance between standardization and pedagogical flexibility
- Clarify and implement teaching observation policy and process

### Measures of Success

- Diversity, retention, and teaching assignments of our faculty and staff
- Rates of compensation and comparisons of workloads and equity
- Number, frequency, and availability of opportunities for speech-writing collaboration
- Number and variety of professional development opportunities
- Articulation of the balance between standardization and pedagogical flexibility
- Clarity of teaching observation protocol

## Objective:

### Establish and Strengthen DWR Partnerships and Collaborations

The Department of Writing and Rhetoric strives to establish and maintain partnerships with various people and organizations, both across campus and in the surrounding community, through discipline-specific outreach, writing center services, and fundraising.

## Action Items

- Explore community writing/speaking center opportunities
- Cultivate partnerships with other campus units
- Strengthen first-year oral communications curriculum, capacity, and role in general education
- Promote the use of OER and open licensing for instructional materials
- Pursue external funding opportunities and grants
- Strengthen support for general education & QEP initiatives
- Create communication-across-the-curriculum opportunities
- Incentivize and support service and experiential learning

## Measures of Success:

- Partnerships with other units on campus
- Capacity in first-year oral communication classes
- Number of grant applications
- Growth of OER in DWR courses
- Number of students served
- Evidence of community outreach and experiential learning





For more information about the department  
and its faculty and staff, please visit  
<https://rhetoric.olemiss.edu>

## **DWR STRATEGIC PLANNING TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP 2017-18:**

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