

Writing Across the Curriculum July 2008

Definitions

“WAC is more than just a set of teaching practices. It is a perspective which argues 1) writing is a central means of learning, clarifying, organizing, and expressing ideas and information and 2) all teachers should share responsibility for helping students become successful writers both inside and outside the classroom. In the best writing –infused classrooms the following goals are being met:

1. Students have learned ways to use writing to learn course material
2. They understand the importance of revision to refine their thinking as well as their writing
3. They believe teachers are interested in actually reading their papers and not simply grading them.” (From George Mason University WAC website)

The five basic principles of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC):

- That writing is the responsibility of the entire academic community
- That writing must be integrated across departmental boundaries
- That writing instruction must be continuous during all four years of undergraduate education
- That writing promotes learning
- That only by practicing the conventions of an academic discipline will students begin to communicate effectively within the discipline.

From: *The WAC Clearinghouse* (<http://wac.colostate.edu/intro/pop3a.cfm>).

Rationale

The premise of WAC is that writing is an essential skill that students need in order to comprehend, synthesize, and analyze a variety of texts in a variety of disciplines.

Intellectual and practical skills were identified as one of the areas of strategic interest and were defined by President Byrd as including three elements:

- “The ability to think critically
- *The ability to communicate effectively* (emphasis added)
- The ability to collaborate and work as a member of a team”

(http://www.simpson.edu/plan/committees/action/IPS_finalreport.pdf).

Recommended Structure

A writing-intensive, “autonomous” (i.e. not the same as any other listed catalog course) interdisciplinary or “non-disciplinary” seminar required in the fall of all new freshmen (perhaps replacing the current LAS). At the end of the course, students who still need work on their writing to get it to an acceptable college level (the particular means of evaluating this will be worked out at a later date) will be required to enroll in a new course, “College Writing” (perhaps numbered English 200) in either the following semester or the first semester of the sophomore

year. Sections of this course would be offered every semester and would replace the current English 101 and 102 courses and be a kind of combination of them.

Students who successfully complete “College Writing,” or whose writing in the freshman seminar is judged acceptable will then be required to enroll in three courses from throughout the curriculum, including one in their major field, designated as “Writing Intensive.” These courses must be completed prior to the student’s final semester, and some means will be devised (perhaps continuing the portfolio requirement currently known as WC II) to provide an independent assessment of the quality of the writing done in these classes.

Criteria for Approving Proposals

The English department will consult with other faculty to develop specific guidelines and requirements for what can qualify as a “writing intensive” course.

1. Proposals will describe the types of discipline (proposals, lab reports etc) specific writing students will undertake over the course of a semester.
2. Number and type of assignments will be listed and samples of each attached.
3. Description of what process (drafting, workshopping, editing and revising) each assignment will incorporate will be described.
4. Type and frequency of feedback will describe.
5. Method of assessment will be described.
6. Sample syllabus will be attached to proposal.

Source Information on Similar Requirements at other Good Schools

The following is a partial list of schools with WAC programs. Information about each of these programs can be found at the *WAC Clearinghouse*. The Clearinghouse includes sample syllabi, information about assessment, FAQ’s, and an extensive bibliography.

Berry College
Coe College
Grinnell College
Howard University
Marshall University
George Mason University
Marquette University
Montgomery College
Central Michigan University
University of Northern Iowa
Iowa State University
University of Iowa

Additional information on how WAC requirements have been implemented in specific classes can be obtained from looking at syllabi. Two particularly helpful examples from outside the humanities are

www.marquette.edu/wac/departamental/MarquetteUniverisityWritinChemistryCourse and www.cetla.howard.edu/wac/syllabi/ECON%20701.htm. This second one is helpful because it is so detailed in both the types of writing students will do and how it will be evaluated.

Teaching Resources

The WAC Clearinghouse (<http://wac.colostate.edu>) has numerous resources for faculty including the following:

- A teaching exchange containing articles about teaching, course syllabi, formal writing assignments, lesson plans, class activities, and faculty tip sheets
<http://wac.colostate.edu/teaching>
- An introduction to WAC offering answers to frequently asked questions such as what kinds of writing can I include? What is writing to learn? Do I have to be an expert in grammar?
<http://wac.colostate.edu/intro>

The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) contains numerous resources for faculty and students.

- Information about Writing across the Curriculum and Writing in the Disciplines is available at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/WAC>
- Information about writing and teaching writing is available at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

Assessment Resources

While assessment occurs in a variety of way the following gives an example of how one school has chosen to undertake the process: “ Both the Writing Across the Curriculum Committee and the Writing Assessment Group conduct ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of our teaching with writing efforts. The University WAC Committee regularly reviews writing intensive syllabi to determine compliance with Senate mandated requirement. The Writing Assessment Group ... works with faculty across the university to assess student writing competence in the majors. The results of both of these assessment processes inform faculty development work. We gather additional information about the effectiveness to WAC from responses to the asked on the Graduating Senior Survey.” More information about this particular program’s assessment practices can be found by accessing the universities: “Assessing the W1 Requirement “and the “Assessing student Writing Competence” links at George Mason.

Examples of Classes

Staffing and Costs

Schools that have successfully implemented writing-across-the curriculum programs all have strong writing centers. We therefore recommend the establishment of a center dedicated to writing within the structure of the Hawley Learning Center, to be staffed with a qualified writing specialist, whose responsibilities would be divided among administration, teaching, and tutoring. Possibly this person could be affiliated with the English department and also be designated as the “writing across the curriculum” director.

Implementation Challenges

It is anticipated that faculty from all departments would participate in the freshman seminar and that, at least in the implementation phase, the English department will provide support for the development and evaluation of the writing component of these courses.