Guidelines for Writing Intensive Courses

Background: Writing Intensive Courses

How best to nurture student writing has been a constant focus in the discussion of general education reform over the past two years. This concern is consistent with William Paterson University's long tradition of supporting writing through its Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program as well as through the current General Education requirement of two foundational Writing-Intensive (WI) courses in the English Department, "Writing Effective Prose" and "Introduction to Literature." There is now widespread agreement among faculty that additional time, attention, and resources should be devoted to student writing. Consequently, the current UCC reform has established the requirement that all students participate in at least four WI courses that are unified around a common set of student learning outcomes. The establishment of these consistent outcomes gives direction to the university community in providing a supportive framework in which students will be given the tools and practice to become better writers and critical thinkers.

The ability to communicate in writing requires practice, feedback and more practice. As noted by John Bean in the respected book *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*:

> No matter how much we *exhort* students to write several drafts and to collaborate with peers, most of our students will continue to write their papers on the night before they are due *unless we structure our courses to promote writing as process* [italics ours]. Teachers can get better final products, therefore, if they design their courses from the outset to combat last-minute writing, to promote exploratory writing and talking, and to encourage substantial revision. (7)

Many faculty assign writing of various kinds in their courses, and some faculty use writing to support the teaching of course content and to develop critical thinking skills in their courses. Furthermore, the Writing Across the Curriculum program will continue to train faculty to provide opportunities for students to develop their writing skills. Realistically, however, not all faculty have the time, interest, and/or perceived skill to work intensively with students on their writing. In addition, class size prevents many faculty from incorporating writing intensive goals. Therefore, by establishing the following explicit requirements to be met in four required WI courses, the UCC reform seeks to ensure that, regardless of their major, all students will work in a sequential, systematic, and intensive way to strengthen their writing skills and increase their understanding and appreciation for how good writing is essential to academic learning and professional success.

Description of Writing Intensive Courses

The new UCC program requires that students complete four (4) writing intensive courses, with at least one at the 300 level or above. The recommendation for implementing that requirement in a meaningful and practical way is:

a) For almost all students, the required foundational course in "Area 2 Expression: Writing" will be their first writing intensive course.
b) Following the foundational course, at least one Writing Intensive course must be taken in the UCC program.
c) At least one Writing Intensive course must be in the student's major, or in a directed co-requirement, where focused attention is given to writing for the discipline.
d) A fourth Writing Intensive course may be taken either in the UCC program, the Major, or from electives chosen for degree completion.

Writing-Intensive Courses are those in which writing is used as a central mode of learning as well as of evaluating student performance. Students in these courses are expected to write regularly, and their grades in these courses are linked to the quality and content of their written work. These courses combine "writing-to-learn" and "writing-in-the-disciplines" (described in the two paragraphs below) as a central component of how the subject matter is presented and how it is learned, thereby offering students a chance to learn about the process of writing by writing often and in different ways and for different audiences, as well as a chance to become competent communicators in a specific field of study.

The writing in the "writing-to-learn" category is designed, primarily, to have students experience the ways in which writing can help them learn something — about what they think, about what they have experienced, about the subject matter of the course, and about critical thinking in the discipline being studied. When instructors use writing-to-learn teaching strategies, they are concerned not primarily with final written products as much as with developing students' abilities to use writing as a primary method of learning.

The writing in the "writing-for-the-disciplines" category is designed to help students write professionally acceptable prose in the field of study. The emphasis is placed on effective communication, and students are required to demonstrate a mastery of the conventions of writing in a specific discipline. For these kinds of large-scale assignments—like term papers and research essays—to be most successful, instructors have to devote a substantial amount of class time to the development of the specific component skills required in this kind of project. In addition, faculty feedback throughout the developing stages of the project is essential, and peer feedback should be encouraged.

Student Learning Outcomes for Writing Intensive Courses in the UCC

In order to receive a Writing Intensive designation (WI), a course must satisfy the following student learning outcomes and explanation below:

Students will be able to

> 1. Use writing-to-learn strategies (such as brainstorming, free-writing, reading logs, etc.) to develop their understanding of course content and to think critically about that content

> 2. Use drafting, revising, editing and other writing processes to develop final writing products appropriate to the discipline, such as thesis-driven essays, formal reports, or professionally formatted manuscripts.

> 3. Use research and documentation skills where they may be necessary and integrate them through paraphrase, quotation and citation, in accordance with the conventions of the discipline.

Guidelines and Characteristics for Writing-Intensive Courses

For a course to be identified by the UCC Council as Writing Intensive, it should have the following characteristics and meet the following guidelines:

1. Students should write throughout the semester, not just at the end and not just for end-of-semester term papers. Writing should be used as means to learn both the content of the course and critical thinking in the discipline.

2. Some amount of class time must be devoted to preparing students to complete writing assignments successfully. This time could include activities like: discussion of assignments and of evaluation criteria, analysis and discussion of sample student writing, peer sharing and discussing of research- and writing-in-progress.

3. In upper-level classes particularly, students should receive instruction in how to write for the specific discipline. They must practice the conventions involved in doing a science report or a business case study, for example. In such courses, a discipline-appropriate paper or report of substantial length should be required.

4. In teaching students to produce end-of-semester papers, major research projects, etc, attention should be paid to the *process* of writing. Journals, note cards, summaries, reports, reviews, and exploratory prewriting could be used in order to help students move toward producing final projects. Major papers should be assigned in such a way that students have the opportunity to receive timely feedback on drafts of their work.

5. Writing Intensive courses should show evidence in their syllabi to using writing both as a learning and an evaluation tool.

6. A minimum of 12 pages or 3000 words of finished prose is required, as well as extensive use of writing-to-learn activities. A significant percentage of the student's final grade should be based on evaluation of the student's written work, both formal and informal, in the course.

7. Writing intensive courses may be in languages other than English.

8. A writing intensive course may be a 3 credit course. In some programs, a 2 credit course may be writing intensive if it meets the writing intensive outcomes and follows the guidelines.

Implementation of Writing-Intensive Courses at WPU

1. To be considered Writing Intensive, courses must be submitted for review in this category by the UCC Committee's Writing Intensive Review Panel.
2. Enrollment in WI classes is to be limited to 25 (22 in Foundational writing course like Writing Effective Prose)
3. A *course* may be designated WI, and therefore all sections of it would be WI. For example, all ENG 110 sections would always be WI.
4. A course may have only *specific sections* designated WI. For example, PBHL 120 may have certain sections designated as WI and therefore only those sections will receive the WI cap on their enrollments.
5. Courses offered within the major that also meet the outcomes for Areas 4, 5 or 6 may also be submitted as WI courses and/or have WI sections. (In this scenario, students would be meeting **three** requirements in one course: completing a course for Area 4, having that class also meet a major requirement, and completing one of the WI requirements.)
6. Major courses that are not offered through the UCC program may be designated WI. Any course requesting a writing intensive designation must be submitted to the Writing Intensive Review Panel.
7. Deans and department chairs will need to work collaboratively on scheduling in order to insure that adequate seats are available each semester for Writing Intensive courses. In order to provide adequate numbers of WI sections each semester, courses must be offered by many departments across the scheduling grid.
8. Every student is required to complete four (4) Writing Intensive Courses. The completed program may look like this:
    1. Foundational Writing (1)
    2. WI options within the UCC (1-2)
    3. WI course in the major to learn appropriate disciplinary methods (1-2)
    4. At least one WI course must be at the 300 or above level.
9. Faculty Development efforts will be critical to encourage the development of WI courses and to train faculty to teach them successfully.

Outcomes and Guidelines for Writing Intensive Courses, Approved by the UCC Council,
April 8, 2010
Revised November 5, 2010

Website Links

Writing-Intensive courses are taught, and required, at most universities and colleges around the country, and there's an abundance of information available online about the range of requirements, approaches, guidelines, and resources. In addition, many of these programs have websites at which examples of Writing-Intensive courses in all disciplines can be found. Below are links to a few of the better sites, along with the kinds of materials to be found at each site:

http://mendota.english.wisc.edu/~WAC/page.jsp?id=128&c_type=category&c_id=58. This site, developed at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, provides guidelines and recommendations for Writing-Intensive courses, as well as one of the most extensive and useful archives of dozens of specific assignments and syllabi in almost all academic disciplines.

http://wac.gmu.edu/program.   George Mason University has one of the most prominent WAC programs in the country, and this website provides a description of almost every aspect of both a superb WAC Writing-Intensive program and of individual WI courses.

http://wac.colostate.edu/programs/. This is the home site of the WAC Clearinghouse, now housed at Colorado State. Links to many of the most interesting WAC and Writing-Intensive programs throughout the country are listed on this page.

http://mwp01.mwp.hawaii.edu/wi-hallmarks.htm. This site is one of the most thorough in the country, and provides every imaginable kind of student and teacher resource, including links to hundreds of other wac programs as well as assignments and syllabi for almost every academic discipline.

http://qcpages.qc.edu/english/degreeprograms/goals_for_student_writing.pdf. This site provides an excellent description of the goals and strategies, SLO's and pedagogical strategies developed at Queens College. Material is organized under the following headings: 1) elements of academic writing; 2) processes and methods; 3) style, conventions, and mechanics; and 4) discipline and profession-specific techniques

Appendices: for nearly thirty years, the Writing Across the Curriculum program has been training faculty to develop Writing-Intensive approaches to courses in all disciplines. In response to these workshops, hundreds of former and present faculty, both full-time and part-time, have created writing-intensive course work and assignments. Below, drawn from a History, a Biology, and a Marketing and Management class, are examples of the kinds of course that that these teachers have found effective.   These documents may be helpful in understanding the kinds of work to be expected, and the kinds of courses to be developed, in order to satisfy the new Writing-Intensive requirement. In the future, an archive of such examples and models from across the curriculum will be established.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: History

The following sample writing exercise was developed as part of a semester-long sequence of critical reading and thinking exercises in History 102, The West and the World. The exercises fostered the students' familiarity with discipline-specific content through a series of primary and secondary source readings. In responding in accordance with the writing structure provided here, the students not only learned the course content, but also developed critical reading and thinking skills while strengthening their ability to organize thesis-driven argumentative writing, which is the most common form of academic writing. Exercises like these can be adapted to any course or subject matter on any academic level, and they can be employed throughout the semester without requiring a great expenditure of time; the exercises can be completed as homework and/or as in-class work.

NAPOLEON'S DIARY

Paris, January 1, 1798

Paris has a short memory. If I remain longer doing nothing, I am lost. In this great Babylon one reputation quickly succeeds another. After I have been seen three times at the theatre, I shall not be looked at again; I shall therefore not go very frequently.

Saint Helena, March 3, 1817

In spite of all the libels, I have no fear whatever about my fame. Posterity will do me justice. The truth will be known: and the good I have done will be compared with the faults I have committed. I am not uneasy as to the results. . Had I succeeded, I would have died with the reputation of the greatest man that ever existed. As it is, although I have failed, I shall be considered as an extraordinary man: my elevation was unparalleled, because unaccompanied by crime. I have fought fifty pitched battles, almost all of which I have won. I have framed and carried into effect a code of laws that will bear my name to the most distant posterity. I raised myself from nothing to be the most powerful monarch in the world. Europe was at my feet. I have always been of the opinion that the sovereignty lay in the people. In fact, the imperial government was a kind of republic. Called to the head of it by the voice of the nation, my maxim was, *la carriere est ouverte aux talens* without distinction of birth or fortune, and this system of equality is the reason that your oligarchy hates me so much.

Step 1. List four to six pieces of information extracted from the diary entries above.
Step 2. Based on the information you've extracted, write down the most important statement you can make about Napoleon.
Step 3. Write a paragraph using your idea and at least four of the pieces of information. This exercise is part of a sequence exploring the craft of the historian: It introduces students to reading and analyzing primary sources, it develops skill in extracting information and creating hypotheses, it reveals that history is shaped by interpretation and personality, and it implicitly teaches paragraph formation.

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Appendix 2: Biology

The following sequence of assignments is an example of the kinds of small "research" assignments that can be structured into a course in any discipline. One important positive feature of the assignment is that it's repeated several times: students develop skills, as we all do, through repetition which leads to mastery. It's also valuable to note that a brief writing of this kind can be graded very quickly, as the example below specifies

The purposes of this assignment for you are a) to practice your academic skills in summarizing information, b) to become familiar with developments in Field Biology as they are reported in the media, and c) to develop skill in using the online resources of the library. After you have read assigned article in *The New York Times,* you are to SUMMARIZE it in ONE brief paragraph (5O word maximum). You are then to go to the library and find TWO citations that relate to the article. Provide the citations using the format described below. Attach a copy of the *New York Times* article to your summary.

Articles from the Q & A section and the Science Watch section of the paper are NOT ACCEPTABLE for this assignment.

The audience for your summary paragraph is a good friend who knows NOTHING about science, and the summary should NOT EXCEED 5O words in length.

The assignment will be assessed on: completeness, relatedness of the citations and the clarity of the summary paragraph.

1. What a brief summary is NOT: (a) A brief summary does not repeat the words of the author of the piece being summarized. It does not merely paraphrase those words either. (a) paraphrase just says in different words what the author said; (b) It usually does not give details, e.g., statistics, examples; (c) It does not start with "This article said..... ."

2. What a brief summary IS: (a) Short; (b) It gives a carefully worded (in your words) short statement of the essential meaning or the main point(s).

3. How to write a brief summary: (a) Read the article quickly to gain an overview of what the author is saying. (b) Rreread the article carefully sentence by sentence to grasp the central issue. (c) Look for topic sentences. (d) Take notes and look up words you don't understand. (e) Now you are ready to write out in YOUR OWN WORDS a summary. If you can't do this without looking at your notes or the article, you probably don't fully understand what the article says. This means you should reread again. (f) Thoughts, ideas, or opinions of yours do not belong in a brief summary. These should be in a separate section entitled "comments." (g) Revise (edit) what you have written to be certain that it contains an accurate summary, is NOT TOO LONG, is in correct grammatical form, and does

not contain misspelled words. (h) You may add your comments on the article at the end of your summary. Be sure you label the section comments.

Sharon Hanks, Biology Department, WPU

Appendix 3: Marketing and Management: Marketing 314, Advertising and Promotion

Many of us value extended research projects as the culminating work in our courses. The example below, developed for a Marketing course but applicable in courses in any discipline, demonstrates that a series of small writing, research, and creative steps throughout the semester can build toward a culminating project. Note that this assignment series also includes both group work and oral presentation as structured aspects of the project

Term Project

Students will organize into teams of 3-5 members for the purpose of completing this project. Your goal will be to develop a marketing communications program for a **new brand** within an existing product category. **Each team member will receive the group grade for the project; if needed, these scores may be adjusted based on input from the peer evaluation forms. C**lassroom time and instructor guidance will be available for working on the project. Teamwork will provide a model work experience typical of advertising creation and management. Moreover, it enhances your people skills and your ability to get work done through cooperation and collaboration.

Here is a suggested project: As you know, several designers (e.g., Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger, Donna Karan) have recently begun plans to enter into the athletic footwear market. You team may choose to develop a marketing communication program for *Calvin Klein's* entry into this category, or you may choose a particular firm/product category on you own with the instructor' approval.

You will position this new brand against **the top 2 or 3 competitors in this category.** Your job is to develop a marketing communication program for this new brand to enable you to compete effectively against the existing competition. Your program will include everything from selecting a brand name and packaging graphics to formulating advertising and sales promotion strategies, point-of-purchase communications, sponsorship marketing efforts, and so on. Obviously, developing such a campaign will require examination of secondary sources beyond the course text.

Project proposal due (2/2): Your proposal should clearly states the project objective, the product category and the company chosen, and your preliminary plan for the project. It should also include information on how you organize your team (e.g., the members of the group, the team manager and the team secretary elected).

First in-class group project meeting (2/17); the objectives of this meeting may include evaluating the work done so far and planing for the next stage.

First draft of the project report is due (4/19). You may need 2-5 copies so that your partner group will be able to read and comment on it before the draft workshop.

Executive summary: You need to hand in an executive summary of 2-4 pages on the same day.

Draft workshop (4/26). You and your partner group will get together during the class time to discuss your first draft. Presentation begins (4/28)
Final draft for all groups due (5/5) This project will culminate in the submission of written reports (160 points) and the delivery of a presentation (40 points). The final report should have a maximum length of 15 pages (not including, cover, TOC, Bibliography, appendix such as sample of your advertisement). Detailed instructions about the content and organization of the paper will be provided.

Evaluation of the final project report will be based on three considerations: the content of the report (60%), its

organization and development (30%), and grammar/style (10%). Refer to the Peer Review Checklist for further information.

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