

UNIVERSITY WRITING REQUIREMENT

Motion to Revise the University Writing Requirement

Passed in Principle May 8, 1995

Passed with amendment and with the attached implementation plan and guidelines on
November 27, 1995

“WRITING INTENSIVE” COURSES. All undergraduates will be required to complete Freshman English plus three “writing intensive” courses, at least one of which will be in the major, and at least one of which will be on a 600-level or above.

RATIONALE

As the cornerstone of any higher education, academic and disciplinary literacy is the concern of the entire faculty and the whole university curriculum. Understanding that literacy is a long-term developmental process, the university community is committed to the following goals for student writing and learning.

- a. Students should use writing as an intellectual process to learn material, to discover, construct, and order meaning.
- b. Students should learn to write effectively in various academic and disciplinary genres for professional and lay audiences.
- c. Students should learn to display competence with the generic features and conventions of academic language.

Writing assignments which support course and curricular objectives are strongly encouraged in all courses, whether they are designated Writing Intensive or not. However, in order to ensure that students have a coherent and intensive set of experiences with writing at the college level that will help them meet the goals listed above, the Academic Senate has passed a motion (May 8, 1995) requiring that students must take at least four courses which are defined as Writing Intensive (WI).

The old writing requirement built into the GenEd program (Groups IV-VIII) is no longer feasible, and students can and do avoid GenEd courses with significant writing components. This new requirement will ensure that students attend to writing throughout the undergraduate career. Courses designated “writing intensive” will be identified in GenEd (by the GenEd Committee) and in each undergraduate major (by department or program faculty). Sufficient seats now exist in GenEd classes of less than 30 to accommodate as many students as might wish to fulfill this requirement with two GenEd courses. The University Writing Center will provide not only individual assistance to students but also consultation to faculty as the attempt to implement “writing across the curriculum.” Writing in the major will take many forms, from senior theses and projects to major special courses.

Motion for Criteria and Implementation of “Writing-Intensive” Courses Passed 11/27/95

1. That the passage of GenEd Revision #1 be finalized with the following description of the general features of Writing-Intensive Courses and implementation plan (see below).

2. Additionally, that a Writing Committee be formally constituted as a Permanent Committee with representation from the following constituencies:

- 1) General Education Committee

- 2) Academic Standards
- 3) A representative from each of the colleges*
- 4) Center for Teaching Excellence
- 5) Coordinator of Composition
- 6) Director of the Writing Center
- 7) Director of the WAC Program
- 8) Undergraduate Student Representatives (to be chosen by the Student Senate)

*Each college will be represented by one of the other categories or by election. Since Liberal Arts (English Department) will have permanent representation through categories 5,6, or 7, there should at least one additional Liberal Arts representative to ensure the other departments can also be represented.

The Writing Committee will:

- a) recommend policies concerning the administration and operation of the University Writing Requirement and WAC/UWC Program,
- b) oversee the development of writing-intensive courses in General Education and in major disciplines,
- c) promote writing across the curriculum,
- d) evaluate the program regularly (every second or third year on a rotating basis using a variety of measures, such as analysis of syllabi, interviewing of faculty and students, surveys, portfolio, etc., and, as necessary, suggest changes in procedure or policies to ensure efficiency, and
- e) advise the Provost on resources required to support the program requirements.

*The Writing Committee will act as a clearinghouse for disseminating information about the University Writing Requirement and will keep and update the information sent by departments, including syllabi and course descriptions. The committee will cooperate with the Registrar’s Office to publish a list of WI courses for the university each year.

*The Writing Committee will not undertake a formal approval process for each course or department plan but will cooperate with departments in their planning. However, to ensure accountability and the provision of adequate support and resources over the long-term, the committee will monitor and assess the WI course offerings regularly (every two or three years) through a variety of means, such as analysis of syllabi and/or portfolios, interviews with faculty and students, surveys and questionnaires.

Guidelines for Writing-Intensive Courses

These guidelines are intended to support and supplement this revision of the university writing requirement. In order to fulfill the following guidelines, Writing-Intensive courses need to be supported by restrictions on class size and/or additional supports such as teaching assistants, class linked tutors, stipends for materials and course development, the Writing Center, and Writing-across-the-Curriculum support. Departments will have the authority to use or reconfigure existing courses or, alternately, to develop new courses to fulfill the WI requirements as they see fit.

1. Students in the course should do *substantial* writing that enhances learning and demonstrates knowledge of the subject or the discipline. Writing should be an integral part of the course and should account for a significant part (approximately 50 percent or more) of the final grade.

Learning in any course includes learning the appropriate ways of reading, writing and thinking for that subject or discipline. Traditional writing assignments, such as senior theses, seminar papers, take-home and in-class essay exams, case studies, laboratory notebooks or reports, proposals, literature reviews, and field research should be considered as possible sources for satisfying the writing requirement. There is no single or universal formula for satisfying the WI requirement as courses naturally differ according to their level, form, and function. For example, General Education courses may emphasize writing-to learn strategies, while major courses may incorporate an additional focus on discipline-specific writing. While it is important to make explicit the conventions of thinking and writing in one's area of expertise, instructors are not expected to treat every mechanical or stylistic infelicity. Students with basic writing problems (constant and recurring difficulties with usage and sentence structure) can be referred to the writing center for assistance.

2. Writing should be assigned in such a manner as to require students to write regularly throughout the course. Major assignments should integrate the process of writing (prewriting, drafting, revision, editing). Students should be able to receive constructive feedback of some kind (peer response, workshop, professor, T.A., etc.) during the drafting/revising process to help improve their writing.

The quantity of the writing required is less important than how the writing is integrated into the course. For example, frequent short writing assignments (2-5pages) for which the student receives comments and an opportunity to revise can sometimes be more effective than long research papers submitted at the end of the course which receive comment and evaluation only after the course is over. Longer assignments can be broken up into stages or components with feedback at critical points to allow for a more effective writing/researching process and, ultimately, a more satisfying product.

3. The course should include both formal (graded) and informal (heuristic) writing. There should be papers written outside of class which are handed in for formal evaluation as well as informal assignments designed to promote learning, such as invention activities, in-class essays, reaction papers, journals, reading summaries, or other appropriate exercises.

Assigning work in a variety of genres for a variety of audiences can help students synthesize and apply disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge effectively. It is important that evaluation of writing be conducted by people trained in the conventions of the genre being used and be appropriate to the nature of the assignment. New writing and assessment strategies, such as portfolio and student self-assessment, are encouraged.