

**GUIDE FOR THE
WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM
FACULTY SENATE COMMITTEE**

The Writing Across the Curriculum Program is supported by the Office of the Provost.



Writing Across the Curriculum

George Mason University

This guide offers faculty who sit on the Faculty Senate’s Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Committee a sense of the philosophy and goals that guide George Mason University’s WAC Program. We hope that it will also help to answer the common questions faculty may have and offer specific guidelines for participation on the WAC Committee and in fostering Mason’s “culture of writing.”

If you have any further questions, please contact Dr. Michelle LaFrance, Director of the Writing Across the Curriculum Program, at mలాfran2@gmu.edu.

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The WAC Committee Charge

From the Faculty Senate Web Site:

(Available at:

http://www.gmu.edu/resources/facstaff/senate/UNIVERSITY_STANDING_COMMITTEE_CHARGES_revised_4-23-14.pdf)

Writing Across the Curriculum Committee

Committee Composition:

One elected representative from each of the academic units offering undergraduate degrees, the Director of the WAC Program who is an ex-officio member with no vote or possibility to chair the Committee.

Official Committee Charge:

To advise and work closely with the University Coordinator of Writing Across the Curriculum on current and projected activities and events, and to assist departments in the identification and definition of writing-intensive courses in their curricula.

To:

- A. Articulate and refine the requirements for the course designated to fulfill the WI requirement in every undergraduate degree across the university with the purpose of establishing homogeneous WI criteria;
- B. Assist colleges, schools and institutes in the identification of existing or new courses that degree programs propose to meet the WI requirement in their curricula;
- C. Review regularly the courses' WI-syllabi to determine compliance with the WI requirement;
- D. Suggest ways to meet the WI requirement for faculty teaching the WI designated courses; and
- E. Assist with activities and events related to writing across the curriculum.

Membership:

Representatives from each of Mason's colleges are recruited or self-identified during the summer months. Members are confirmed at the first Faculty Senate meeting of the new academic year.

Meeting Logistics

Meeting Schedule:

The WAC Committee meets 4 to 8 times annually. Members will be contacted via email to establish the meeting schedule for the academic year. We do ask that members respond quickly so that WAC Program staff can confirm times/dates of meetings for each semester and schedule the necessary rooms.

Meeting Agendas

The week before the meeting, the WAC Committee Chair will send an email to all members of the Committee to share topics of discussion and to request additional agenda items. Syllabi or

other materials that require discussion or a vote will be circulated via email prior to the meeting. We ask members to bring a tablet/laptop with them to the meeting to access these documents. It is helpful for members to read materials ahead of time in order to expedite discussions and voting.

Meeting Structure

During meetings, we follow loose parliamentary procedure. All votes (e.g. approval of WI courses or amendment of the WI course criteria) require a quorum.

The Committee meetings are run by the Chair of the Committee, who is responsible for moving the Committee through the agenda and soliciting votes on syllabi or other actions.

Generally, meetings begin with the introductions of attendees and a short discussion of writing-related matters. The agenda then moves to the most pressing topic for discussion, which is generally the approval of WI courses. Any other speakers or discussions are scheduled for the end of the meeting.

Past speakers have included Associate Provost for Graduate Education, Cody Edwards; Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, Bethany Usher; and others.

Roles and Responsibilities of WAC Committee Members

Committee Member Responsibilities

- We ask that all members make a good faith effort to attend all meetings.
- Please let the Chair of the WAC Committee and the WAC Director know when/if you cannot attend a regularly scheduled meeting.
 - If you cannot attend a meeting that will entail the review of a WI course proposal, please review any WI course syllabi in advance of the meeting and submit your feedback to the WAC director via email so that your voice may be included in the discussion of the course.
- Please help us share information about events and initiatives related to writing and WI courses at Mason by forwarding email and/or communicating with your departmental colleagues about committee decisions and discussions.
- Any Committee Member who would like to suggest an agenda item may send it to the Committee Chair and WAC Director so that these ideas may be included on the agenda of the next meeting.

Advocating for Writing

Part of being a representative on the WAC Committee means being an advocate for writing in your college and across the university's programs, departments, and sites of instruction. We ask that you come to WAC Committee meetings prepared to discuss what's going on with writing in your school or college, and consider what you might bring back to your faculty members from our meetings.

Roles and Responsibilities of WAC Program Staff

From the Faculty Senate WAC Committee Charge: “The Director of the WAC Program . . . is an ex-officio member with no vote or possibility to chair the Committee.”

The WAC Program Director:

- Consults with faculty and departments who are proposing new or changing existing WI courses in the majors.
- Collects and distributes course proposal forms and syllabi for all WI courses that will undergo Committee review.
- Provides the Committee’s feedback to faculty and departments, requesting changes if necessary or continuing to workshop syllabi to meet the WI Course Criteria.
- May lead working groups of Committee Members on small-scale projects.
- Coordinates the collection of WI Course Syllabi and other instructional artifacts to review and evaluate WI Courses.

The WAC Program staff will:

- Assist Committee Members in finding meeting times that allow the most Committee Members to meet consistently during the semester.
- Support the Committee in developing meeting agenda and Committee priorities.
- Reserve meeting rooms and provide technological support for meetings.
- Provide access to materials for consideration.
- Circulate communications (agenda, supplemental materials, and meeting minutes) as necessary.
- Keep a Master List of all approved WI Courses in coordination with the Office of the Registrar, the Mason Core Committee, and the Provost’s Office.
- Make the WI Course Criteria available to the Mason community at large.

WAC Committee Activities

What does the WAC Committee do? This section offers a general overview of the Committee's typical activities and processes.

Reviewing/Approving WI Courses

The WAC Committee oversees the "writing intensive course" approval process, ensuring that all proposed courses meet the requirements for the "WI" designation, as well as encouraging a strong culture of writing in the disciplines.

Each college has a representative on the WAC Committee, which ensures that all departments are represented in the decision-making process. The Committee's many consultants are experts in teaching writing and faculty development. They do not have voting power but offer vital perspective and insights into the design of courses and assignments.

Requirements for Writing-Intensive Courses

- **Section size is limited to 35.**
 - However, the WAC Committee strongly encourages departments to set enrollments at 25 or lower. Lower student enrollments enable both instructors and students to meet WI goals successfully.

- **Faculty will devote significant time to instruction on writing in the course and on how to complete assignments successfully.**
 - Detailed written assignments with explicit learning goals and evaluative criteria are strongly encouraged as part of this instruction. Expectations should be communicated for all types of writing, including writing in digital spaces, as appropriate to the assignment. For example, expectations for a blog or discussion post may vary depending on the purpose for the assignment and the discipline, and these distinctions and expectations should be made explicit.

- **Students are required to revise at least one substantive assignment in the course based on instructor feedback.**
 - In courses in which students complete multiple short assignments of a similar nature (e.g., mathematical proofs) revision need not be required. However, instructor feedback should still be given so that students have the opportunity to improve. If the only assignment in the course is not due until the end of the course, it should be divided into sequenced sections that receive feedback and can be revised.

- **Students will receive instructor feedback on their writing.**
 - Feedback should focus on how meaning is made in the discipline, including organizational strategies, written forms and conventions, appropriate evidence and source use, etc. The types of writing and the grade value assigned to them will vary according to the discipline and the assignment. *Note:* While peer feedback can also be a valuable part of the process, it does not replace instructor expertise.

- **All of the writing assignments in the course should count substantially toward students' final grades in the course. To this end, students should be asked to write a minimum of 3500 words, divided among two or more assignments.**
 - Writing that specifically addresses and is graded on how well students address the content, intended audience, and rhetorical purposes can count towards the minimum word requirement.
- **WI Courses must be offered and taken in the major.**
 - Departments are encouraged to develop WI Courses within the major as part of the core curriculum offered. In rare circumstances, a new and/or developing program may need to seek a temporary arrangement with a different department or unit to provide WI course credit to students. In this case, please contact the Director of the WAC Program to discuss the application and approval process.

WI Course Approval Process

All WI courses must be approved by the Faculty Senate's WAC Committee. Instructors are asked to work closely with the appointed departmental committee and/or representatives to be sure they are designing a course that truly fulfills the needs of students. The Director of the WAC Program is available for consultation at any time.

Anyone submitting a course is asked to fill out the WI Course Approval & Change Form (available at wac.gmu.edu/wi-course-approval-change-form/). They submit this form with a sample course syllabus and other supporting documentation that they would like the Committee to consider.

The WAC Director will review submitted materials and suggest possible revisions in advance of the WAC Committee's review and discussion of the course. Following any necessary revisions, the course will be discussed at the next scheduled WAC Committee meeting.

The Program encourages those submitting WI courses to contact the WAC Director well in advance of the desired approval date, as meeting schedules can vary dramatically from semester to semester.

Voting on WI Courses

A quorum of voting members must vote on each WI course. As such, it is important that Committee Members review any WI course syllabi needing approval in advance of regularly scheduled WAC meetings, so that the syllabi may be discussed in depth during the committee meeting.

Voting on WI syllabi entails indicating whether Committee Members require further revisions, approve, or provisionally approve (with minor revisions) the WI course syllabi submitted.

Should a syllabus be returned to a faculty proposer for further revision, the Committee must be prepared to offer feedback on the syllabus and to review the revisions once returned to the Committee for consideration.

Writing-Intensive Courses Versus “Writing Rich” Courses

Many faculty include writing assignments in their courses; however, not all courses that meet the requirements above have gone through the WI approval process with the Senate Committee. It is important that Senators communicate that in order for students to receive credit for completing their “WI” requirement, they must take the approved WI course or courses for their major. You can direct students or faculty to the Mason Core page (see: <http://masoncore.gmu.edu/writing-intensive-2/>) or the Mason Course Catalog (see: <https://catalog.gmu.edu/mason-core/#text>), both of which have a full list of WI courses.

Description of the Writing Across the Curriculum Program

The Mason WAC Program was started in 1993 by Dr. Christopher Thais and Dr. Stanley Zoltek when the first WI Courses were approved by the Faculty Senate. Mason's WAC Program has been nationally recognized for 16 years as a national model for writing in the disciplines. (Please see the 2017 "writing program" rankings: <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/writing-programs>). We hold this honor alongside programs at Harvard, Duke, Cornell, Brown, and Princeton. Mason's WAC Program is one of only three recognized programs at public universities.

WAC Mission and Goals

Central to our Program's mission is the belief that when students are given frequent opportunities for writing across the university curriculum, they think more critically and creatively, engage more deeply in their learning, and are better able to transfer what they have learned from course to course, context to context. The WAC Program supports the goals laid out in the new Strategic Plan by focusing on writing as a pedagogical tool that enables students to develop critical, analytical, and innovative thinking to address complex social issues, and on faculty development in support of excellence in teaching.

Our Program draws on the concept of the "vertical" curriculum: in the designated composition classes (English 101 and English 302), students are asked to reflect on how writing is a form of problem solving in the different communities and disciplines to which they belong. The Writing Intensive course, a course situated in the majors, introduces students more specifically to the writing and problem-solving methods in their chosen fields.

Mason's WAC Program is guided by the *Statement of WAC Principles and Practices*, approved by the International Network of WAC Programs (INWAC) in February 2014 and the Executive Committee of College Composition and Communications in December 2014. The Statement can be found at: <http://wac.colostate.edu/principles/statement.pdf>.

Our local principles:

- Writing is an important tool for learning and discovery as well as for conveying what has been learned and discovered.
- Students gain proficiency as writers when they have frequent opportunities to write in courses across the curriculum, addressing a range of audiences and practicing the genres typical of their majors and the workplaces they will enter.
- Faculty across the curriculum share responsibility for helping students learn the conventions and rhetorical practices of their disciplines.
- Students benefit from having opportunities to revise based on meaningful feedback from their teachers; that is, feedback that teaches and provides direction rather than focusing solely on error.
- Writing instruction must be continuous throughout students' undergraduate education.

Our Program's focus on writing as a critical, analytic, and imaginative pedagogical tool that enables students to address complex social issues (and on the faculty development necessary to support excellence in teaching) forwards Mason's Mission Statement and 2013 Strategic Plan.

The most visible components of WAC at Mason are:

- the WI requirement in the major (apart of the Mason Core requirements);
- the Mason WAC Committee appointed by the Faculty Senate, which approves all WI Courses;
- the Advanced Composition requirement (English 302).

Please note: Writing Across the Curriculum does not administer English 101 or English 302. The WAC Program does not oversee the Writing Center. WAC is a Provost's Office initiative that supervises upper-level writing-intensive courses and supports faculty development in teaching writing in the disciplines.

Professional Development: Consulting, Workshops, and Online Resources for Faculty

Good teaching practices are reinforced through faculty development workshops, departmental assessment workshops, consultation with faculty and departments, and collaboration with other teaching-focused units across the university, including the Mason Core, CTFE, OSCAR (the Students as Scholars Initiative), the University Libraries, and the University Writing Center (which provides vital support for student writers).

Additionally, the WAC website (wac.gmu.edu) and *The Writing Campus* newsletter celebrate and support faculty efforts in teaching with writing. The WAC blog, also named *The Writing Campus*, provides reflections and resources for teaching writing (thewritingcampus.com). Our Facebook page, *The Writing Campus: Blog of the George Mason WAC Program*, provides timely articles and tips on teaching and writing.

Disciplinary Goals for Student Writers

While the learning and writing outcomes expected of students are always particular to courses and majors, most writing-intensive course(s) share the following goals for students in the major:

- To analyze and synthesize course content using methods appropriate to the major;
- To make reasoned, well organized arguments with introductions, thesis statements, supporting evidence, and conclusions appropriate to the major;
- To use credible evidence, to include, as applicable, data from credible primary and/or secondary sources, integrated and documented accurately according to styles preferred in the major;
- To employ a range of appropriate technologies to support their researching, reading, writing, and thinking, with particular attention to the ways that advanced students and professionals locate, analyze, organize, and share information;
- To employ rhetorical strategies suited to the purpose(s) and audience(s) for the writing, to include appropriate vocabulary, voice, tone, and level of formality;
- To produce writing that employs the organizational techniques, formats, and genres (print and/or digital) typical in the major and/or workplace;
- To produce writing that demonstrates proficiency in Standard Edited American English, including correct grammar/syntax, sentence structure, word choice, and punctuation.

WAC's Institutional Location

WAC is currently housed under the supervision of Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, Dr. Bethany Usher. Our Director, Dr. Michelle LaFrance, is a faculty member in English who reports to Dr. Usher.

Our offices are physically located in Robinson Hall near the English Department.

Key Terms in WAC

Below are a variety of terms you may hear during the course of WAC Committee meetings. This glossary was developed from the WAC Program at Appalachian State University.

(<http://wac.appstate.edu/writing-disciplines/wac-glossary-terms>)

WAC, or WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM is a writing instruction program that pervades the entire college curriculum where interdisciplinary approaches use writing to learn and to communicate in general education as well as major courses of study.

WID, or WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES refers to the writing done in a student's chosen field of study.

A GENRE is a mode of discourse suitable for a specific purpose or field. Each academic discipline has its own manner of expression, vocabulary, formats, and habits of thought so that anyone intending to communicate in that field must be familiar with and be able to join in its expression. Michael Carter of North Carolina State says in "Ways of Knowing, Doing, and Writing in the Disciplines,"

Miller, Bazerman, and Russell ... define genre as social action, ways of doing and writing by which individual linguistic acts on the microlevel constitute social formations on the macrolevel.... [T]hey establish the concept of genre set as a collection of related genres [and] use the genre set to indicate the role that related genres play in constituting complex social formations. (393)

(See METAGENRE below.)

INFORMATION LITERACY: Information literate students can recognize an information need, find, select, locate and evaluate the information they need, and incorporate what they discover competently and responsibly in any field. Information literate students should be able to demonstrate competencies in formulating research questions and in their ability to use information.

METAGENRE is defined by Michael Carter of NC State as "a higher category, a genre of genres." He adds, "[A] metagenre indicates a structure of similar ways of doing that point to similar ways of writing and knowing" (393). Carter's four metagenres (or ways of doing) are

- (1) **Problem Solving** (defining a problem and creating a solution such as in business, marketing and management plans, project reports or proposals, and technical and feasibility reports);
- (2) **Empirical Inquiry** (drawing conclusions based on investigation of empirical data as in laboratory or research reports, research proposals, scientific articles and presentations);
- (3) **Research from Sources** (data from secondary sources intrinsic to a discipline such as History or English); and
- (4) **Performance** (knowing as doing, performance and its artifacts such as drawings, sculptures, paintings, films, news stories and editorials, websites, Power Point presentations, technical reports, theatre and dance exhibitions).

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS is the term for the adaptation of one skill set in a particular context to a different context. The “soft” transfers entail contexts that are similar, while the “hard” transfers depend on deliberate abstraction from one context to another. An example of a soft transfer would occur when a student new to History creates a References page in APA format, using the skills previously learned for creating a Works Cited page in MLA format; a hard transfer occurs when a student uses the skills learned when writing a literacy narrative to write a historiography essay.

A VERTICAL CURRICULUM refers to a coordinated and progressive laddering of skills where early attempts build to emerging or advanced mastery toward expert and professional mastery.

In a Vertical Curricular Model, students take multiple writing courses during the years of their undergraduate experience with increasing introduction to and specialization in their chosen fields.

- **English 101** is a freshman-level course that explores expository writing, research, and critical thinking.
- **English 302, Advanced Composition**, builds on the general college-level writing skills and strategies students have acquired in earlier courses. It prepares them to do advanced-level analysis and writing specifically within their major field and their possible future workplaces.
- **Writing Intensive**, which is at least one upper-division course in each major, has been designated as fulfilling the university’s Mason Core “writing intensive” (WI) requirement. These courses are meant to instruct students on writing in the major and are taught by disciplinary faculty.

Appendix – Recent WAC Committee Faculty Senate Reports

2014-2015

Writing Across the Curriculum Committee Report

Chair: Gregory Robinson (Chair, CVPA – 2015)

Committee Members: Jacquelyn Brown (School of Business – 2015); Shahron Williams van Rooij (CEHD – 2015); Steve Holmes (CHSS – 2016); John Aditya (VSE – 2016); Mary Ewell (COS – 2016); Stanley Zoltek (COS – 2016)

Consultants to the Committee: Charlene Douglas (CHHS – 2016); Julie Stoll (INTO Mason Language Specialist); Peggy Brouse (Systems Engineering); Peter Farrell (VSE); Susan Lawrence (Director, Writing Center); Karyn Mallet (INTO Mason); Larry Rockwood (Biology); Ellen Rodgers (CEHD); Sarah Baker (English – NVWP); Jen Stevens (University Libraries); Bethany Usher (Center for Teaching Excellence, OSCAR); Laura Lukes (Center for Teaching Excellence); Jessie Matthews (Composition)

WAC Program:

Director: Michelle LaFrance

Assistant Director: Caitlin Holmes

WAC Program Graduate Research Assistant: Caitlin Dungan

The Committee has met 6 times (to date) during the 2014-2015 academic year. The Committee's charge includes: advising the director of Writing Across the Curriculum, approval of new writing-intensive (WI) courses, regular review of WI course syllabi, and assisting with activities and events related to Writing Across the Curriculum.

2014-2015 Committee Actions:

- Approved new WI Courses: FAVS 498, ENGH 305, HDFS 401, NEUR 410, NEUR 411, ACCT 461, FNAN 498, MGMT313, MKTG 471, MIS 330, SRST 450
- Developed a policy on WI courses outside the major.
- Discussed whether WI course should be required to carry a 3-credit minimum.

WAC Program Director Activities (Discussed w/ WAC Committee Members):

- Worked with Associate Provost Janette Muir to create a working group in support of multilingual writers to discuss support services for multilingual writers.
- Hosted a gathering for faculty who teach composition courses at NOVA Annandale to discuss common goals and topics of conversation between campuses.
- In partnership with SOM 301 and BIO 308 faculty, reinstated the Writing Fellows Program.
- Prepared the WAC newsletter for release in April of 2015.

- Continued progress on the program's scholarly-blog, *The Writing Campus*, developing a review board and review process for submissions.

Other:

- For the 13th year in a row, Mason's WAC program made the *U.S. News* "Best Colleges 2013" list of highly ranked colleges for Writing in the Disciplines (WID).

Report compiled by Michelle LaFrance, Caitlin Holmes, and Caitlin Dungan

2015-2016

Writing Across the Curriculum Committee Report

Chair: Gregory Robinson (Chair, CVPA – 2017)

Committee Members: Gregory Robinson (WAC Committee Chair, CVPA – 2017), David Gallay (B-School – 2017), Margaret Miklancie (CHHS – 2017), Kristien Zenkov (CEHD – 2017), Steve Holmes (CHSS – 2016), Johri Aditya (VSE – 2016), Mary Ewell (COS – 2016), Stanley Zoltek (COS – 2016)

Consultants to the Committee: Charlene Douglas (CHHS – 2016); Julie Stoll (INTO Mason Language Specialist); Peggy Brouse (Systems Engineering); Peter Farrell (VSE); Susan Lawrence (Director, Writing Center); Karyn Mallet (INTO Mason); Larry Rockwood (Biology); Lorelei Crerar (Biology); Jacquelyn Brown (B-School); Ellen Rodgers (CEHD); Sarah Baker (English – NVWP); Jen Stevens (University Libraries); Bethany Usher (Center for Teaching Excellence, OSCAR); Laura Lukes (Center for Teaching Excellence); Jessie Matthews (Composition)

WAC Program:

Director: Michelle LaFrance

Assistant Director: Tom Polk

WAC Program Graduate Research Assistants: Emily Chambers and Alisa Russell

The Committee has met 5 times (to date) during the 2015-2016 academic year. The Committee's charge includes: advising the director of Writing Across the Curriculum, approval of new writing-intensive (WI) courses, regular review of WI course syllabi, and assisting with activities and events related to Writing Across the Curriculum.

2015-2016 Committee Actions:

- Approved new WI Courses: SRST 450, ENGH 373, ENGH 313, GEO 334, ME 444
- Discussed enrollments in WI courses to assess compliance with 35-seat requirements and addressed non-compliant courses/departments.
- Revised WI criteria to include a requirement that these courses carry a 3-credit minimum, with exceptions available to those that demonstrate how students are asked to meet all other requirements of a WI course and speak to issues of faculty workload.
- After presentation by Karyn Mallet and Anna Habib of Multilingual Task Force, encouraged writing to Provost in support of financial requests from this study

WAC Program Director Activities (Discussed w/ WAC Committee Members):

- Collaborated with CTFE to host Faculty Retreats in January and May
- Continued RE/View project by conducting interviews and classroom observations, collecting syllabi, and reviewing those syllabi for compliance

- Developed WAC Committee Guide for committee members
- Prepared the WAC newsletter for release in April 2016
- Continued progress on the program's scholarly-blog, *The Writing Campus*, by further developing a review board and review process for submissions.
- Increased the WAC program social media presence by maintaining a Facebook page and Twitter feed.

Other:

- For the 14th year in a row, Mason's WAC program made the *U.S. News* "Best Colleges 2015" list of highly ranked colleges for Writing in the Disciplines (WID).
- Hired Tom Polk as the new full-time, 12-mo Assistant Director of WAC in Spring 2016

Many thanks to Michelle LaFrance, Tom Polk, and Emily Chambers for compiling this report.

2016-2017

Writing Across the Curriculum Committee Report

Chair: Gregory Robinson (Chair, CVPA – 2017)

Committee Members: Stanley Zoltek (COS – 2018), Kamaljeet Sanghera (VSE – 2018), Douglas Irvin-Erickson (S-CAR – 2018), Misty Krell (CHSS – 2018), David Gallay (B-School – 2017), Margaret Miklancie (CHHS – 2017), Kristien Zenkov (CEHD – 2017)

Consultants to the Committee: Charlene Douglas (CHHS – 2016); Julie Stoll (INTO Mason Language Specialist); Peggy Brouse (Systems Engineering); Peter Farrell (VSE); Susan Lawrence (Director, Writing Center); Karyn Mallet (INTO Mason); Larry Rockwood (Biology); Lorelei Crerar (Biology); Jacquelyn Brown (B-School); Ellen Rodgers (CEHD); Sarah Baker (English – NVWP); Jen Stevens (University Libraries); Bethany Usher (Center for Teaching Excellence, OSCAR); Laura Lukes (Center for Teaching Excellence); Jessie Matthews (Composition)

WAC Program:

Director: Michelle LaFrance

Assistant Director: Tom Polk

WAC Program Graduate Research Assistants: Judy Hu and Clare Moore

WAC Undergraduate Program Assistants: Alexander O’Leary and Summer Claveau

The committee has met 5 times (to date) during the 2016-2017 academic year. The committee’s charge includes: advising the director of Writing Across the Curriculum, approval of new writing-intensive (WI) courses, regular review of WI course syllabi, and assisting with activities and events related to Writing Across the Curriculum.

2016-2017 Committee Actions:

- Approved new WI Courses: RHBS 499, ME 444, and GCH 411
- Reviewed research findings from ongoing WAC program review on the use of technology and the types of writing assigned in writing intensive courses
- Discussed plans for celebrating the National Day on Writing in October 2017

WAC Program Director Activities (Discussed w/ WAC Committee Members):

- Collaborated with CTFE to host Faculty Retreats in January and May
- Continued RE/View project by producing a series of reports on the kinds of readings and writing assigned in writing intensive courses
- Collaborated with cross-campus partners to plan for the National Day on Writing celebration in October 2017
- Developed the *Writer’s of Mason* profile series to highlight the variety of writing that happens on campus

- Continued progress on the program’s scholarly-blog, *The Writing Campus*, by further developing a review board and review process for submissions.
- Revised WAC Committee Guide for committee members
- Continued the WAC program social media presence by maintaining a Facebook page and Twitter feed.

Other:

- For the 15th year in a row, Mason’s WAC program made the *U.S. News* “Best Colleges 2016” list of highly ranked colleges for Writing in the Disciplines (WID).

Many thanks to Michelle LaFrance and Tom Polk for compiling this report.

Appendix – Review of WI Course Syllabi Academic Year 2015-2016

Date: April 20, 2016

To: Provost S. David Wu, Associate Provost Janette Muir, Undergraduate Deans and Directors, Department Chairs, and Faculty Senate Chair

From: Michelle LaFrance, Director, Writing Across the Curriculum and Gregory Robinson, Chair, Writing Across the Curriculum Committee

CC: WAC Committee Members and Consultants *, Associate Provost Kim Eby

Subject: **Review of Writing-Intensive Course Syllabi**

Executive Summary

In spring 2016, the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program staff conducted its fifth review of syllabi from all writing intensive (WI) courses in fulfillment of its Faculty Senate charge for ongoing assessment of the requirement. Following is a brief summary of our main findings. (See http://wac.gmu.edu/program/wi_requirement/ for a description of the requirement.)

- 108 syllabi were reviewed from the spring 2015, fall 2015, and a few previous semesters.
- 29 (27%) of the 108 syllabi collected met all of the recommended guidelines for WI courses.
- The remaining 79 (73%) were missing one or more elements identified in the guidelines.

The WAC Committee asks for your assistance in encouraging faculty to incorporate the following best practices for teaching with writing into their WI courses:

- schedule multiple class days for discipline-specific writing instruction and/or workshops;
- offer models for and advice on what constitutes successful writing in the course;
- specify due dates for assignments, including drafts and revisions;
- assign shorter papers due at intervals throughout the semester or divide a single term paper project into stages that receive feedback;
- provide at least one week or more for students to revise assignments after receiving feedback from instructors; the period of time should increase as the length of the assignment increases;
- give written assignments rather than verbal instructions or a short note in the syllabus;
- explain how the assignment connects to learning goals in the course;
- provide evaluation criteria with the assignment to convey writing expectations;
- align feedback and evaluation criteria to course learning and writing goals.

* **Committee Members:** Gregory Robinson (WAC Committee Chair, CVPA – 2017), David Gallay (B-School – 2017), Margaret Miklancie (CHHS – 2017), Kristien Zenkov (CEHD –

2017), Steve Holmes (CHSS – 2016), Johri Aditya (VSE – 2016), Mary Ewell (COS – 2016), Stanley Zoltek (COS – 2016)

Consultants to the Committee: Charlene Douglas (CHHS – 2016); Julie Stoll (INTO Mason Language Specialist); Peggy Brouse (Systems Engineering); Peter Farrell (VSE); Susan Lawrence (Director, Writing Center); Karyn Mallet (INTO Mason); Larry Rockwood (Biology); Lorelei Crerar (Biology); Jacquelyn Brown (B-School); Ellen Rodgers (CEHD); Sarah Baker (English – NVWP); Jen Stevens (University Libraries); Bethany Usher (Center for Teaching Excellence, OSCAR); Laura Lukes (Center for Teaching Excellence); Jessie Matthews (Composition)

WAC Program:

Director: Michelle LaFrance

Assistant Director: Tom Polk

WAC Program Graduate Research Assistant: Emily Chambers

Detailed Report

As part of its charge from the Faculty Senate to conduct ongoing assessment of the WI requirement, in spring 2016 the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program staff conducted its fifth review of syllabi from all WI courses on record in all colleges and schools offering undergraduate majors (62 academic units in total). With the help of the Office of the Associate Provost of Undergraduate Education, the program contacted all departments and instructors teaching a WI course to request WI syllabi from Spring 2015 and Fall 2015. In response, we received 108 WI course syllabi representing 81 WI courses. (See detailed list of WI courses and number of syllabi reviewed at the end of this report.)

Results of Syllabi Review

Approximately 27% of the 108 syllabi collected met *all* of the guidelines for WI courses as outlined by the Faculty Senate. Guidelines established by Faculty Senate's Writing Across the Curriculum Committee include

- WI syllabi should state explicitly that the course fulfills the WI requirement,
- Students will write 2 essays totaling at least 3,500 words,
- Students will receive feedback from their instructor,
- Students will receive specific information about how their writing will be evaluated.

Approximately 73% of the submitted WI course syllabi were missing information about one or more of these requirements. As in previous years, the WAC director contacted the undergraduate coordinator, and/or faculty members whose syllabi did not meet the WI requirements, to ask for revision and resubmission.

Based on the WI categories reviewed, syllabi submitted from the WI courses in the following departments met *all* of these requirements:

CHHS: Health and Human Policy (HAP 465), Department of Global and Community Health (GCH 465), and Nursing (NURS 465);

CHSS: Bachelor of Individualized Study (BIS 390), Communications (COMM 300), Criminology Law, and Society (CRIM 495), English (ENGL 305), Global Affairs (EVPP 337), History (HIST 499), Philosophy (PHIL 421/2), and Psychology (PSYC 301);

COS: Environmental Studies (EVPP 337) and Forensic Science (FRSC 304);

CVPA: School of Art (AVT 395), School of Dance (DANC 390), Film and Video Studies (FAVS 470), School of Music (MUSI 332), and Theater (THR 350);

Volgenau: Computer Science (CS 321);

BUS: School of Management (SOM 301), and Marketing (MKG 471);

CEHD: Athletic Training/Tourism and Events Management (PRLS 450) and Human Development and Family Science (HDFS 401); and

S-CAR: none

**NOTE: Some of the above courses also submitted syllabi that did not meet all criteria.*

Of the 108 syllabi reviewed, 2 did not meet any of the WI requirements and 77 only partially met the WI requirements¹ for one or more of the following reasons:

- They did not state on the syllabus that the course fulfills the WI requirement for the major;
- They did not indicate that students will be graded on a minimum of 3,500 words, divided among two or more assignments or a longer project divided into stages;
- They contained little to no description of how or when the instructor would provide feedback to students; or
- They contained little to no description of the criteria by which the students' writing would be evaluated.

For syllabi in this category, the individual instructors and/or the undergraduate coordinators/associate chairs were contacted, informed about the WI criteria, and asked to submit a revised syllabus for the spring or fall section(s) of the course that explicitly indicated the ways in which the course meets the requirements.

Conclusions

Overall, the reviewers were pleased with their ability to review at least one syllabus from nearly all WI courses. Only two courses failed to submit a syllabus for review. This allowed us to

¹ Names of specific courses and sections are available on request.

review a broader span of courses than previous years. For comparison, the most recent report reviewed 72 syllabi from courses taught in the Fall 2010 academic semester.

Clearly, a systematic review of WI syllabi allows for ongoing oversight of the WI requirements. The WAC Committee has recommended, in fact, that WI syllabi be reviewed annually, but targeting particular departments and units on a rotating basis. A review of WI syllabi alone, however, cannot reveal the effectiveness of the writing assignments or of the instruction in writing that is being given (if any). The review also cannot evaluate all aspects of an instructor's course planning. For instance, several syllabi mentioned schedules that would be posted in Blackboard, but the program is unable to review these schedules. What we can ascertain is the degree to which many teachers seem to be following recommended best practices for assigning writing and responding to student writers, as these are described in their syllabi. These include, for example:

- assigning shorter papers due at intervals throughout the semester or dividing a single term paper project into stages that receive feedback;
- giving written assignments rather than verbal instructions or a short note in the syllabus;
- explaining how the assignment connects to learning goals in the course;
- offering advice on what constitutes successful writing in the course;
- providing evaluation criteria along with the assignment so that students understand expectations;
- dedicating class time to discipline-specific writing instruction;
- aligning feedback and evaluation criteria to course learning and writing goals.

Recommended Actions

Based on some of the gaps in the WI syllabi and the questions around teaching-with-writing practices that surfaced in this review, and given that papers from WI courses are being assessed as part of the university's efforts to respond to criteria for Academic Program Review and to the SCHEV mandate to assess student writing competence, we make the following recommendations to departments:

- *Offer explicit support for and encouragement of faculty development in teaching with writing, which can be achieved at the department level through short workshops on, for example, assignment design and managing the paper load; through departmental writing assessment workshops; and, more generally, through venues such as the Innovations in Teaching and Learning Conference sponsored by the Center for Teaching Excellence.*
- *In annual reviews, acknowledge and reward faculty who consistently demonstrate their willingness to teach WI courses because they are committed to helping students learn to write well in the major. This is particularly important given studies that show that course evaluations tend to be lower for faculty in the disciplines when they take student writing seriously in their courses.*
- *Encourage departments to standardize their WI course syllabi. When a course is taught by a new faculty member each semester or offering, the requirements and the expectations of the course can drift away from the original descriptions approved by the WAC committee. Even small changes can make a substantial impact on the writing*

instruction that takes place within a course. Departments that standardize the WI syllabus could prevent some of the drift when the course is taught by a new faculty member each semester.

- *Encourage departments to assign WI courses to full-time professors.* If this is overly difficult or not possible, departments should consider assigning a full-time faculty member to coordinate WI courses and mentor new or part-time instructors.

To increase the number of courses that are meeting the WI course criteria in the future, it is recommended that the WAC director re-implement the following actions:

- Pre-semester reminder emails to all faculty teaching WI courses listing the requirements for WI courses along with attachments on assignment design, responding to writing and managing the paper load, and writing in large classes.
- Semesterly check of enrollments in WI courses to be sure that enrollment caps are being followed (i.e., nothing higher than 35).
- Reminder emails to undergraduate chairs and unit leaders asking them to make sure that new or adjunct faculty who are assigned to teach WI courses are aware of the requirements.

The WAC program staff and Committee extend their thanks to all faculty members who are committed to teaching effectively with writing and to helping students achieve the learning and writing goals valued in the course and the curriculum.

MASTER LIST – WI Courses Reviewed

College of Business

Course Prefix	Course Number	Section	Semester	Number of Syllabi Reviewed
ACCT	461	1	Fall 2015	1
FNAN	498	1	Fall 2015	1
MGMT	313	1	Fall 2015	1
MIS	330	1	Spring 2015	1
MKTG	471	1	Fall 2015	1
SOM	301	1	Fall 2015	1
			TOTAL	6

College of Education and Human Development

Course Prefix	Course Number	Section	Semester	Number of Syllabi Reviewed
HDFS	401	1	Fall 2015	1
PHED	340	1	Fall 2014	1
PRLS	450	5	Fall 2015	1
			TOTAL	3

College of Health and Human Services

Course Prefix	Course Number	Section	Semester	Number of Syllabi Reviewed
GCH	465	1	Fall 2015	1
HAP	465	1	Fall 2015	1
SOCW	471	1, DL 1	Fall 2014	2
NURS	465	1	Spring 2015	1
			TOTAL	5

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Course Prefix	Course Number	Section	Semester	Number of Syllabi Reviewed
ANTH	490	1	Spring 2015	1
ARTH	430	1	Fall 2015	1
ARTH	440	1	Fall 2015	1
ARTH	499	1	Fall 2015	1
BIS	390	DL 1	Fall 2015	1
CHIN	480	1	Fall 2015	1
COMM	300	1, 4, 5	Fall 2015	3
CRIM	495	3	Fall 2015	1
ECON	470	1	Fall 2014	1
ECON	355	1	Spring 2014	1
ECON	435	1	Spring 2013	1
ECON	365	1	Fall 2014	1
ECON	345	1	Spring 2013	1
ENGH	305	3	Fall 2015	1
FREN	309	1	Fall 2014	1
HIST	499	3, 4	Fall 2015	2
HIST	300	3	Fall 2015	1
HIST	499	2	Spring 2015	1
LAS	300	1	Fall 2015	1
NEUR	411	1	Spring 2013	1
NEUR	410	2	Fall 2013	1
PHIL	421 or 422	1	Fall 2015	1
PSYC	304	1	Fall 2015	1
PSYC	301	207, 209	Fall 2015	2
PSYC	309	1	Fall 2015	1
PSYC	301	209	Spring 2015	1
RELI	420		Spring 2015	1
RUSS	302	1	Fall 2013	1

SOCI	412	1	Spring 2013	1
SPAN	370	1	Spring 2013	1
			TOTAL	34

School of Policy, Government, and International Affairs

Course Prefix	Course Number	Section	Semester	Number of Syllabi Reviewed
GOVT	490	1, 2, 3, 4	Spring 2015	4
GOVT	491	1	Fall 2015	1
			TOTAL	5

College of Science

Course Prefix	Course Number	Section	Semester	Number of Syllabi Reviewed
ASTR	402	1	Spring 2015	1
BIOL	308	1	Fall 2015	1
CHEM	465	1	Fall 2015	1
CHEM	336	1	Fall 2015	1
CLIM	408	1	Fall 2015	1
EVPP	337	1, 2, 3, 6, DL 1, DL 2	Spring 2015	6
FRSC	304	1	Fall 2015	1
FRSC	302	1	Spring 2013	1
GEOL	317	1	Fall 2014	1
GEOL	305	1	Fall 2015	1
GGS	415	1	Spring 2015	1
MATH	290	2	Fall 2015	1
MLAB	300	1	Spring 2014	1
PHYS	407	1	Spring 2015	1
			TOTAL	17

College of Visual and Performing Arts

Course Prefix	Course Number	Section	Semester	Number of Syllabi Reviewed
AVT	395	1, 2	Fall 2015	2
AVT	395	2, 3	Spring 2015	2
DANC	390	1	Fall 2015	1
FAVS	498	4	Fall 2015	1
FAVS	470	1	Spring 2013	1
GAME	332	1	Spring 2015	1
GAME	332	2, 3	Fall 2015	2

MUSI	332	1, 1	Fall 2015	2
MUSI	438	1	Spring 2015	1
THR	350	1	Fall 2015	1
THR	482	1	Fall 2012	1
THR	350	1	Spring 2015	1
			Total	16

Volgenau Engineering School

Course Prefix	Course Number	Section	Semester	Number of Syllabi Reviewed
BENG	304	1	Spring 2015	1
BENG	495	1	Spring 2015	1
CEIE	301	1	Spring 2015	1
CS	321	1	Fall 2015	1
CS	306	1, 2, 3	Spring 2015	3
CYSE	491	1	Spring 2015	1
ECE	445	1	Spring 2015	1
ECE	333	1	Spring 2015	1
ECE	491	1	Fall 2015	1
IT	343	1	Fall 2015	1
SYST	489	1	Fall 2014	1
			TOTAL	13

New Century College

Course Prefix	Course Number	Section	Semester	Number of Syllabi Reviewed
NCLC	312	2	Fall 2015	1
NCLC	334	1	Fall 2015	1
NCLC	336	1	Fall 2015	1
NCLC	333	1	Fall 2015	1
NCLC	345	1	Fall 2015	1
			TOTAL	5

School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Course Prefix	Course Number	Section	Semester	Number of Syllabi Reviewed
CONF	302	1	Fall 2015	1
			TOTAL	1