



April 8, 2015

TO: Undergraduate Academic Affairs Council

FROM: Deborah Schlacks, Coordinator of Writing across the Curriculum

SUBJECT: Seeking governance approval of WAC ~~Expectations~~ [Guidelines](#) for a Writing-Infused Major or Minor

Attached is a document entitled "~~Expectations~~ [Guidelines](#) for a Writing-Infused Major or Minor" for which I, as Coordinator of Writing across the Curriculum, am seeking governance approval.

I seek this approval in accordance with the Strategic Plan's mandate that each High Impact Practice (WAC being one of them) attain such governance approval of its "quality standards." This document embodies the WAC quality standards, though using the terms "~~expectations~~" "[guidelines](#)" and "best practices."

Please note that this document takes a program-wide rather than a course-level approach to Writing across the Curriculum in keeping with the developmental nature of writing skills. That is, such skills are best enhanced across time and in multiple courses acting in concert. Models used in creating this document have included the Writing-Enriched Curriculum Project at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities and the Writing in the Major Program at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

Thank you for your consideration.

Guidelines for a Writing-Infused Major or Minor

If your academic program has adopted Writing across the Curriculum as one of the High Impact Practices to be used in a particular major or minor, you are asked to have a **writing-infused major or minor**. A writing-infused major or minor uses student writing as a prime way to help achieve learning goals of the major or minor. As a guideline, around 60% of the courses within the major or minor will be either writing-intensive or writing-inclusive. At least one *required* course is to be writing intensive.

Much more important than percentages is that the writing-infused major or minor manifest the program's **WRITING PLAN**, crafted collectively by the academic program through the following process:

1. Through discussion, the program identifies what genres graduates ought to be able to produce, what writing skills graduates ought to have in order to function effectively, and where writing can help students learn course content better (called "Writing to Learn"). To gain a better idea of the current state of the writing of its graduates, the program can, if desired, examine samples of the writing exiting students produce and/or survey students to see how they view their experience with writing in the courses in the program.
2. Based on this information, the program incorporates writing into its learning goals. (The program may already have done so.)
3. The program identifies where in the major or minor achievement of the identified or developed goals are currently worked on: that is, where in the coursework are the identified genres introduced and practiced? Where in the coursework are the identified skills introduced and reinforced? Where is "Writing to Learn" used? Are the genres and skills appropriately sequenced? How are major writing projects being scaffolded, including encouraging students to revise their work?
4. Based on all this information, the program makes any needed changes in courses, major/minor requirements, sequencing, and use of scaffolding.
5. The program incorporates assessment of writing into its programmatic assessment model. (The program makes further changes as needed, based on the results of the assessment each time.)

Once these steps have been completed, the program will compose a Writing Plan based on the findings. The Plan, which will be presented for approval to the WAC Program, will

1. Show that the above process was undertaken and completed and that there is shared ownership of the Writing Plan by all program faculty and instructional staff
2. Answer the following questions regarding the writing-infused major or minor:
 - a. What student needs were revealed via the program's discussion (see #1 above)?
 - b. How has student writing been incorporated into learning goals for the major or minor?
 - c. Where in the coursework for the major or minor are the identified genres to be introduced and practiced? Where are the identified skills to be practiced? Which courses are or are to be writing intensive? Writing inclusive?
 - d. How will writing in the writing-intensive courses be scaffolded, including emphasis upon revision?
 - e. Where and in what ways is "Writing to Learn" to be used?
 - f. What is the sequencing plan?
 - g. How do you plan to assess whether this Writing Plan is working?
 - h. What changes, if any, from the prior curriculum of the major or minor are reflected in this Writing Plan?

For ease in responding to the above items, the attached Writing Plan Template is provided for programs' use in applying for the writing-infused designation. In addition, the list of criteria that will be used to consider Writing Plans for approval is attached.

Follow-up yearly comments within the department's annual reports will show how the plan is being implemented.

RELATED DEFINITIONS:

Writing-intensive course: In a writing-intensive course, student writing plays a central role, accounting for a sizable proportion (at least 30%) of the course grade. Writing-intensive courses will include both informal, ungraded writing assignments (Writing to Learn) and formal, graded writing assignments. In a writing-intensive course, the instructor uses WAC best practices in assigning, coaching, and evaluating the writing students do for the course. **NOTE: A Writing-Certificate-Eligible course** is a writing-intensive course that has met more specific requirements as to the use of WAC best practices.

Writing-inclusive course: Not every course lends itself to being writing-intensive! Some courses are too large, for instance. However, writing can still be part of the non-writing-intensive courses in meaningful, helpful ways. In a writing-inclusive course, some student writing is part of the course, but not so extensively as in a writing-intensive course. Writing-inclusive courses may have some combination of formal and informal (Writing to Learn) writing assignments or may have just one or the other. The writing assignments in such a course are worth from 10-30% of the course grade. In a writing-inclusive course, the

instructor uses WAC best practices in assigning, coaching, and evaluating the writing that students do for the course.

Programs that seek approval of a major or minor as writing infused do not need to separately have courses approved as writing-intensive and writing-inclusive. (If, however, they wish, as an option, to have any of their writing-intensive courses receive the Writing Certificate Eligible designation [as defined below], they will need to have the courses approved for that designation.)

Writing to Learn: The use of writing in the classroom in order to foster critical thinking, deeper thought, and deeper understanding of knowledge taught in any discipline. Low-stakes, ungraded writing assignments are stressed.

Scaffolding: moving students progressively through the writing process for a writing project, including encouraging them to revise; moving students progressively through the building of writing skills in a series of courses, such as throughout a major/minor

WAC best practices:

- Using Writing to Learn, as defined above
- Communicating with students about writing projects, including giving well-designed written directions, clear explanations of learning goals, and appropriate evaluation criteria for writing assignments and offering effective feedback on student writing
- Scaffolding, as defined above
- Encouraging students to seek appropriate assistance outside the classroom, such as from the Writing Center

Writing-Certificate-Eligible Course Criteria (FYI; already approved by governance for Certificate of Writing Excellence Program)

A Writing-Certificate-Eligible (WCE) course

- Integrates writing with course content (That is, writing is not an “add on.”)
- Provides multiple opportunities for students to write, including
 - At least one formal writing assignment, which may include genres characteristic of the discipline involved
 - Informal writing assignments that emphasize writing-to-learn and/or prepare the students for the formal writing assignments of the course
- Spaces writing assignments reasonably across a semester, rather than having one long assignment due at the close of the term
- Encourages students to use a writing process via providing opportunities for revision and via the breaking of major writing assignments into stages (ie, *scaffolding*)
- Is defined as Writing Intensive (that is, writing assignments account for at least 30% of the course grade and consist of both formal and informal writing)

The course syllabus for a Writing-Certificate-Eligible course will

- State that the course is a Writing-Intensive course
- State that the course is a Writing-Certificate-Eligible course
- Indicate how writing serves the goals of the course
- Assign a substantial* amount of writing in the form of multiple assignments that span the semester, including both formal and informal writing (Rough drafts count toward the total, as do essay exams.)
- Include at least one formal scaffolded writing assignment that *requires* drafting and revision at the draft stage. Opportunities for revision can happen via such practices as
 - Holding peer revision workshops
 - Requiring or encouraging visits to the Writing Center by students for assistance**
 - Requiring drafts be submitted to the instructor for feedback followed by revision
- Include informal writing assignments or activities that promote writing-to-learn and/or prepare the students for the formal writing assignment(s) of the course
- Indicate how the quality of student writing on the major assignment(s) and the completion of the informal writing assignments will affect the course grade

The instructor will also provide the following to students:

- Assignment sheets for writing assignments—one per formal assignment, and at least one overall for the informal assignments
- Written evaluation criteria for writing assignments

*In recognition of the fact that disciplinary genres differ in length, the meaning of “substantial” in a given case will be determined by the department or academic program involved, after consideration of appropriate genres in the discipline, and is subject to the approval of the WAC Coordinator.

**Availability of this option is subject to sufficient Writing Center capacity.

Writing Plan Template
(to be used by academic programs for composing their Writing Plans
and presenting the plans for approval)

1. Show that the process described on the “[Guidelines](#) for a Writing-Infused Major or Minor” document was undertaken and completed and that there is shared ownership of the Writing Plan by all program faculty and instructional staff (Attach documentation, such as meeting minutes, as necessary.)

2. Answer the following questions regarding the writing-infused major or minor. (Attach documentation as needed to answer questions fully.)
 - a. What student needs were revealed via the program’s discussion?

 - b. How has student writing been incorporated into learning goals for the major or minor?

 - c. Where in the coursework for the major or minor are the identified genres to be introduced and practiced? Where are the identified skills to be practiced? Which courses are or are to be writing-intensive? Writing inclusive?

 - d. How will writing in the writing-intensive courses be scaffolded, including emphasis upon revision?

 - e. Where and in what ways is “Writing to Learn” to be used?

 - f. What is the sequencing plan?

 - g. How do you plan to assess whether this Writing Plan is working?

 - h. What changes, if any, from the prior curriculum of the major or minor are reflected in this Writing Plan?

The _____ Program in the _____ Department hereby commits itself to implementation of the above plan.

Signatures of all Program Faculty and Instructional Staff who teach a course or courses in this major or minor:

Signature of Department Chair

Writing Plan Criteria
(to be used by the WAC Program in considering Writing Plans for approval)

A Writing Plan submitted for approval will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. The plan substantiates that the academic program underwent the process described in the “[Guidelines for a Writing-Infused Major or Minor](#)” document.
2. The plan substantiates that there is shared ownership of the plan by all program faculty and instructional staff.
3. The plan identifies the genres and writing skills that the program sees as needed by its graduates.
4. The plan shows that writing has been incorporated into the learning goals of the major or minor.
5. The plan indicates where in the curriculum the identified genres and skills are or are to be practiced.
6. The plan identifies which courses are or are to be Writing Intensive and which are or are to be Writing Inclusive.
7. The plan clearly shows how and where within the curriculum scaffolding, including emphasis upon students’ revising their writing, takes place or will take place.
8. The Writing Plan includes a sequencing plan that fits the curriculum and allows for scaffolding of skills across courses.
9. The Writing Plan includes a workable assessment plan.
10. The Writing Plan identifies the changes in curriculum (if any) that it entails.