
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: THE SENATE INTELLECTUAL FOUNDATIONS OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

FROM: THE SIFOC WRITING OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE, (SUSAN M. LEIST, CHAIR); ROSALYN LINDNER, ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR ASSESSMENT

SUBJECT: WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM FOR THE UPPER LEVEL WRITING REQUIREMENT

DATE: 2009?

REPORT ON ASSESSMENT OF WRITING SAMPLES AND SYLLABI FROM
UPPER DIVISION "W" COURSES FROM ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

The IF Writing Oversight Committee, a subcommittee of SIFOC and the Senate Curriculum Committee, conducted an assessment of the Writing Across the Curriculum program for the upper level writing requirement on January 14, 2008. The Committee decided in fall 2007 that an assessment of the current program practice and products was a necessary step in the re-examination of the WAC program at Buffalo State.

The assessment questions and the answers provided for them by the results of this undertaking were

- Do Buffalo State graduates write competently? **Two thirds do, but 19% approach the standards without meeting them, and 14% fall far below our standards.**
- Does writing competency depend on where students take their basic writing courses? **No, there was basically no difference if students took CWP 101/102 or took writing courses at their previous school.**
- Do syllabi satisfy W requirement as stated in our policies? **One third does and over one third clearly does not, while the remainder of them satisfies requirements somewhat. The criteria in the attached rubric for "W" syllabi are taken directly from the current catalog text on policy guidelines for "W" courses. The syllabi that did not meet the standards cited in that text fell short of those standards in these ways:**
 1. A number of the inadequate syllabi, about 10 of them, did not mention writing at all. They should never have had a "W" designation.

2. Many of the inadequate syllabi had no mention of informal writing-to-learn strategies. According to the catalog text as reflected in the rubric, “W” course syllabi should contain both informal writing-to-learn strategies as well as formal writing assignments that provide for revision of writing and instructor feedback.
3. Many of the inadequate syllabi contained no evidence of ongoing in-class or out-of-class student writing.
4. Many of the inadequate syllabi contained formal writing assignments but made no provision for instructor feedback or student revision.
5. Many of the inadequate syllabi made no mention of linking student outcomes with writing or a minimum standard for writing. (Many had no student outcomes whatsoever.)

Assessment Recommendations

The recommendations ensuing from the results of this upper level writing requirement assessment are as follows:

1. The existing policy and guidelines for the Writing Across the Curriculum program for the upper-level writing requirement should continue and be affirmed as part of Intellectual Foundations Program.
2. For the use of academic departments, the Writing Oversight Committee will add information and articulation to those guideline regarding the employment of departmental portfolios (containing samples of both revised, formal writing and informal writing-to-learn) as a means of fulfilling the requirement rather than using “W” courses. The Committee strongly advocates use of the portfolio option. Members of the Committee will meet with all departments of the college during the 2008-2009 school year to discuss the optional use of portfolios to fulfill the “W” requirement, providing consultation for each department to create a customized set of requirements for a student writing portfolio reflecting the department’s discipline.
3. The Writing Oversight Committee also strongly advocates faculty development training in use of the techniques of writing to learn. Faculty development institutes reflecting the GUIDELINES FOR WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM COURSES will be conducted by a variety of qualified leaders on a regular basis during summer and winter breaks. The Committee believes that all new faculty should attend such training (or demonstrate that they already have such training) before they can teach “W” courses.

4. The Committee will request new submissions of “W” courses to be done during fall 2009 for effect in fall 2010. Each department should offer either two permanent upper level “W” courses, in addition to electives sometimes taught as “W,” OR departments should construct requirements for their program portfolio to go into effect in fall 2010. Documents requested for the submission would consist of a statement articulating the “W” characteristics of each course that is submitted for “W” status. The submission would be conducted in a timely manner to provide for the exigencies of scheduling needs.
5. The Writing Oversight Committee will request status as the Senate Curriculum Committee designate for approving “W” course syllabi.
6. The Writing Oversight Committee will conduct regular assessments of the “W” program, using comparable methodology, as do the IF Cognate Areas, but on a two-year cycle. This 2008 assessment will be the baseline for future assessments.