
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: ACADEMIC COUNCIL

FROM: THE SIFOC WRITING OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE, (SUSAN M. LEIST, CHAIR); SIFOC (DOUG KORITZ, CHAIR); ROSALYN LINDNER, ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR ASSESSMENT; JANET RAMSEY, DEAN OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

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

DATE: 5/1/2008

**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 for this undertaking were

1. Do upperclassmen at Buffalo State write competently according to the standards articulated in our upper division writing requirement policy?
2. Do Buffalo State students who took CWP 101/102 write better as upperclassmen than students who took basic writing courses elsewhere?
3. Do syllabi for courses taught to satisfy Buffalo State’s upper division writing requirement meet the standards articulated in our policy for the upper division writing requirement?

Dr. Lindner’s office collected “W” course syllabi from all the departments in all the schools. These syllabi were for courses taught in fall 2007. (Many “W” courses are taught only one semester per year, so those taught only in spring were not included.) The Committee is considering repeating this assessment for spring syllabi. “W” syllabi from all departments (73 in total) were evaluated. All departments (except Music, Business, Dietetics, Nutrition and Technology) sent a class set of writing samples from their highest level “W” course. Therefore, the sample reflected the highest level of undergraduate writing on the campus.

The actual reading for the assessment process was conducted by a team of five members of the Writing Oversight Committee: Susan Leist, Sarah Meredith, Ralph Wahlstrom,

Scott Johnson, and Doug Koritz. The team met and read in the Provost's conference room on January 14, 2008.

Since the seat limit for "W" courses is 25, the team decided to read a 20% sample - 5 papers from each section. (The 20% sample model is the one used by the SUNY system in assessing general education on all SUNY campuses.)

The rubrics for reading and judging the papers and syllabi (see attached) were constructed by the Writing Oversight Committee from the current catalog text that states policy guidelines for "W" courses. The criteria used in the rubrics are direct quotes from the existing Buffalo State policy for the Writing Across the Curriculum program.

The assessment team read 129 papers and 73 syllabi over the course of the day.

The results are as follows:

	Student Writing Samples			
	Took 101/102 At BSC	Did not take 101/102 at BSC	N/A*	Total
Meets/Exceeds Standards	35 (67%)	41 (64%)	10 (77%)	86 (67%)
Approaches Standards	9 (17%)	13 (20%)	3 (23%)	25 (19%)
Does not meet Standards	8 (15%)	10 (16%)		18 (14%)
Total	52 (40%)	64 (50%)	13 (10%)	129 (100%)

* One submission was wrongly stapled and not evaluated.

Syllabi for "W" Courses

Meets/Exceeds Standards:	23 (32%)
Approaches Standards:	22 (30%)
Does not meet Standards:	28 (38%)

Total

73 (100%)

The results of the assessment provided answers to the assessment questions:

- 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 satisfy 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 by the College Senate 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.
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 a “clean slate” new submission for “W” courses to be done during fall 2009 for effect in fall 2010. Each department should offer either two 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 spring 2010. (The WOC will offer consultation and help to departments in constructing their portfolio requirement.) 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 for any given semester.
6. The Writing Oversight Committee will conduct regular assessments of the “W” program, using comparable methodology, on a three-year cycle as do the IF Cognate Areas. This 2008 assessment will be the baseline for future assessments.