



Writing Across the Curriculum

George Mason University

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WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE REPORT TO FACULTY SENATE AY 2023-2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This year, the WAC Committee reviewed all Writing Intensive (WI) courses (46 total) from the following academic units: CHSS, CEHD, CPH, and Schar. The purpose of this effort was to assess the integration of the [new WI learning outcomes](#) as part of [the Writing-intensive \(WI\) Course Enhancements Process](#). A key finding of this review reveals that WI courses exhibit three levels of integration: writing-intentional, writing-enriched, and writing-assigned. The WAC Committee recommends that academic units wishing enhance their Writing-intensive course designs (1) add class activities that directly address the WI outcomes, (2) identify and discuss the role of writing in the course and major, and (3) articulate unit-wide plans for professional development to enhance the sustainability of WI courses.

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FULL REPORT

For the past several years, the WAC Committee and WAC Program have focused on [the Writing-intensive \(WI\) Course Enhancements Process](#). The immediate goal of this process is to facilitate the integration of [new WI learning outcomes](#), but the larger vision of the enhancements process aims to stimulate conversation about the intentionality and sustainability of the WI course (and writing education) in unit curricula.

This process commenced in AY 2020-2021 when the Committee began articulating a new vision for the WI course and subsequently developed new learning outcomes to forward this vision. In AY 2021-2022 and AY 2022-2023, members engaged WI stakeholders to design and begin implementing a process for integrating the new outcomes into all WI courses. This year, the Committee continued to facilitate this process and began assessing its progress.

To conduct this assessment, Committee members have reviewed materials from 46 WI courses submitted by units from the following colleges and schools: CHSS, CEHD, CPH, and Schar. Next year, the Committee will review materials from CVPA, CEC, COS, CCB, and Carter.

In these materials, Committee members are looking for units to articulate the reason they have designated their WI course(s) as writing-intensive, demonstrate the integration of the WI outcomes, and consider the system they have (or hope to have) for maintaining alignment with the expectations of a WI course, including supporting the faculty who teach these courses.

The following document highlights a key finding from the review to date and offers three recommendations to units wishing to enhance their Writing-intensive courses. Expanded results and a summary of the review process are included in the appendices. Individual reviews have been shared with their respective units.

KEY FINDING: WI COURSES EXHIBIT THREE LEVELS OF WRITING INTEGRATION

Writing-intentional (rated as exemplary by reviewers): The 16 courses (35%) in this category draw clear connections between writing assignments and the WI outcomes, and they incorporate significant instructional practices -- including class activities, resources, and assessment processes (self, peer, and faculty driven) -- that help students realize the values, expectations, and practices for writing within their fields. They typically articulate a clear reason for obtaining the WI designation and describe a system for supporting faculty and maintaining alignment with the WI category (or steps toward developing such a system). For these reasons, courses in this category demonstrate exemplary integration.

List of exemplary courses: The WAC Committee wishes to recognize and celebrate the courses that were rated exemplary by reviewers.

- **CHSS:** COMM 300, BIS 390, ENGH 305, PHIL 421/422, RELI 420, ARTH 471, ARTH 474, ARTH 482, ARTH 499, HIST 300, KORE 370, SPAN 370
- **CPH:** HAP 465, NUTR 326
- **CEHD:** ECED 411, EDSE 452, ELED 305

Writing-enriched (rated as satisfactory by reviewers): The 29 courses (63%) included in this category show strong promise as WI courses but have not quite assembled all the elements of the writing-intentional course. These courses typically include significant opportunities for students to write and revise their writing based on feedback. In some cases, these writing assignments have clear connections to the WI outcomes; in others, they might not fully explain their alignment. These courses might also include resources on writing for students, but their course materials might not demonstrate the presence of significant writing instruction. In other cases, the course might indicate class sessions that will focus on writing but might not include enough details to understand the purpose of that instruction in relation to disciplinary writing practices. They might also not have a fully articulated reason explaining why the course holds the WI designation.

Writing-assigned (rated as unsatisfactory by reviewers): Courses in this category exhibit little to no adherence to the goals of the WI. They do not offer a clear rationale describing the reason for the WI designation. They primarily use high-stakes writing assignments to assess or examine student learning and do not offer students low-stakes opportunities to practice writing skills or deepen their learning through feedback and revision. These courses also do not include information about the kinds of writing instruction they offer. In all, these courses offer few if any opportunities for students to learn the value, expectations, and practices for writing in their disciplines. Only 3 of the reviewed courses (7%) were included in this category.

RECOMMENDATIONS: SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION REQUIRES INSTRUCTION AND INTENTIONALITY

Units wishing to enhance their Writing-intensive course design and increase student success with writing should consider the following recommendations.

1. ***Add class activities that directly address the WI outcomes, writing assignments, and writing in the discipline.*** Units wishing to enhance or rethink their WI course design(s) might first consider the opportunities students have to talk about their writing with faculty and peers. Contrary to some common conceptions, the key feature of the WI is the instruction and mentorship offered by a practicing member of a discipline (the faculty), not the amount of writing students produce or are assigned. The courses in this review sample that most successfully integrated writing included class activities that demystify the processes and expectations for good writing in the discipline. Thus, a first step toward enhanced integration includes [adding class activities](#) that focus on writing assignments and provide students opportunities to talk about their writing and developing conceptions of writing in the discipline.

2. **Identify and discuss the role of writing in the course and major.** To further enhance integration, units might more intentionally discuss the role of writing in their course, curriculum, and discipline. The courses in this review sample that most successfully integrated writing identified a clear role for writing in the course that complemented the broader aims of the course (and degree program). In these courses, students had opportunities to learn or deepen their understanding of course content as they learned to write in the major. These roles were often communicated to students in course materials with links between assignments and learning outcomes.
3. **Articulate unit-wide plans for professional development and support for faculty to enhance the sustainability of WI courses.** Finally, units should develop plans for the collective support and development of faculty who teach Writing-intensive courses and other courses that assign writing. Plans might include scheduling regular opportunities to discuss writing in the major (e.g., identifying where writing is assigned in the major or reviewing assessment data on student writing at the course level or across the major) or addressing the labor conditions that enable effective instruction (e.g., lowered course enrollments or formal recognition of the work involved in teaching a WI course). These local efforts can lead to better student outcomes, an exchange of resources and strategies for teaching writing, and a shared vision for writing in the unit.

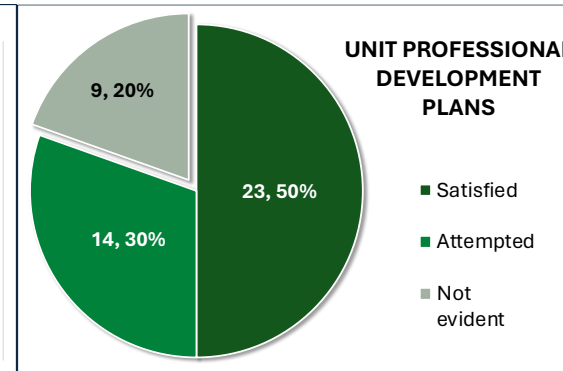
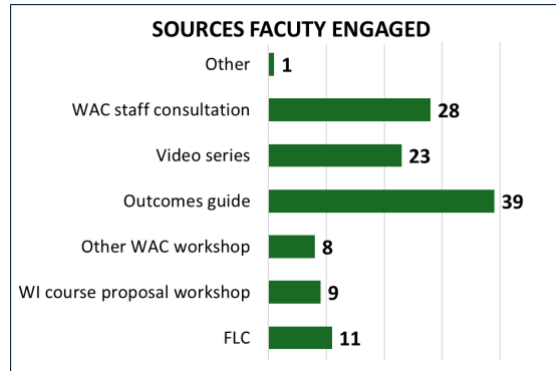
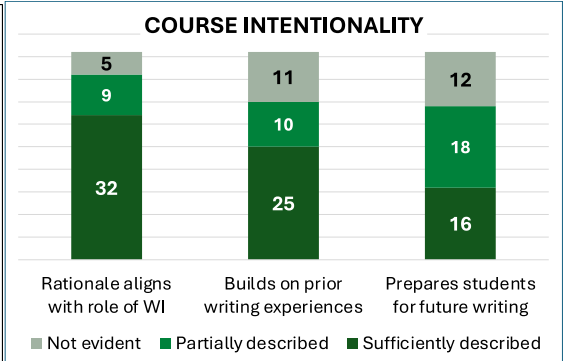
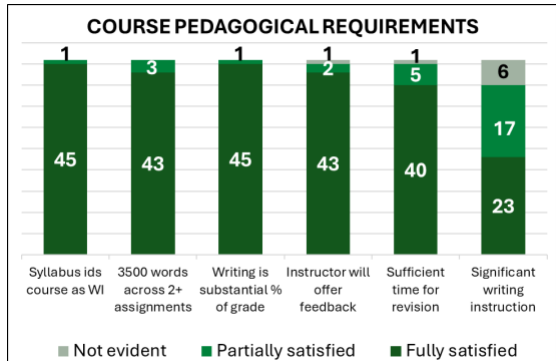
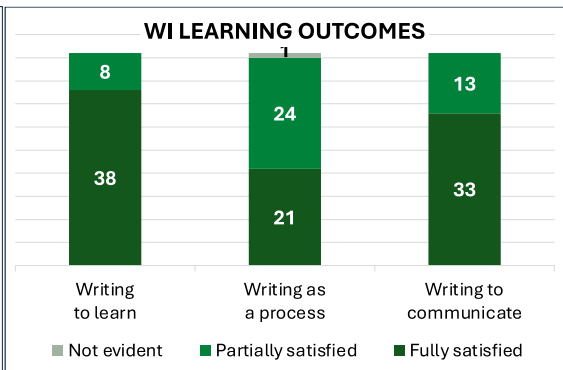
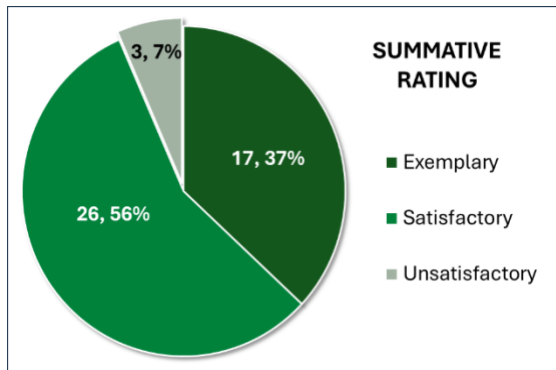
NEXT STEPS

The WAC Committee and WAC Program plan to take the following next steps:

1. Continue review of materials through AY 24-25; colleges and schools included in upcoming review cohorts include CVPA, CEC, COS, CCB, and Carter
2. Revise the WI course application/enhancements worksheet to more effectively prompt units to share the information relevant to the expectations for a WI course
3. Hold meetings with colleges to review and discuss assessment results and next steps they might like to take to enhance their writing curricula (in collaboration with the WAC Committee)
4. Curate a resource bank of WI materials to provide models of exemplary course designs, assignments, and activities
5. Research, recognize, and celebrate significant instructional practices that facilitate student writing development at Mason
6. Continue developing then disseminate the “WAC Committee Statement on Significant Writing Instruction” to offer guidance on instructional practices and the teaching-labor conditions that enable them

APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF RESULTS (46 COURSES)

CHSS COHORT 33 courses	CEHD COHORT 5 courses	NEW COURSES ADDED 3 courses	COURSES POSTPONED 3 courses
SCHAR COHORT 2 courses	CPH COHORT 6 courses	COURSES EXEMPTED 2 courses	COURSES DROPPING DESIGNATION 12 courses



- EXEMPLARY (17 courses):**
- ARTH 471
 - ARTH 474
 - ARTH 482
 - ARTH 499
 - BIS 390
 - COMM 300
 - ECED 411
 - EDSE 452
 - ELED 305
 - ENGH 305
 - HAP 465
 - HIST 300
 - KORE 370
 - NUTR 326
 - PHIL 421/422
 - RELI 420
 - SPAN 370
- KEY AREAS TO ADDRESS**
- Instructional activities
 - Peer review
 - Support for faculty
 - Integration of WI into major curriculum

APPENDIX 2: PROCESS OF MATERIALS REVIEW

Courses were reviewed for their alignment with the expectations of a WI course. Categories of these expectations include a rationale describing the unit's reason for obtaining a WI designation, the course's adherence to WI criteria, the course's integration of the WI outcomes, and the unit's plan for managing the course, including supporting the faculty who teach it. Individual items in these categories can be viewed on the [Committee's review rubric](#).

All materials submitted to the WAC Committee were examined by at least two reviewers. Courses that received discrepant ratings were examined by a third reviewer to reach a consensus rating. Reviewers consisted of college representatives on the WAC Committee and WAC Program staff. All reviewers participated in a pre-review orientation and norming session and a post-review discussion of ratings and observations. These discussions helped strengthen the review process, identify trends in the overall ratings, and brainstorm actions the Committee can take to further support faculty and units.

APPENDIX 3: COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Co-Chairs: Thomas Polk (WAC Director), Seth Hudson (CVPA)

College Representatives: Leslie La Croix (CEHD), K. Raven Russell (CEC), Eric Anderson (CHSS), Daniel Hanley (COS), Ellen Laipson (Schar – 2024), Ashley Yuckenburg (CCB), Cheryl Oetjen (CPH), Virginia Blair (CPH), VACANT (Carter)

Additional Committee Members: Susan Lawrence (Writing Center) Courtney Adams Wooten, (Composition), Laurie Miller (INTO-Mason), Celine Apenteng (Student Senate)

Ex Officio Members: Jen Fehsenfeld (University Libraries), Laura Poms (Mason Core Committee) Gina Polychronopoulos (Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning)

WAC Program Staff: Joan Hwang (Graduate Assistant Director), Kerry Smith (Graduate Assistant), Tim Lilley (Faculty Fellow)

APPENDIX 4: COMMITTEE INTERACTION WITH SENIOR LEADERSHIP

1. Senior leadership and their respective offices did not announce initiatives or goals that directly related to the charge of our committee.
2. Our committee did not seek information or input from the President, Provost, or Senior Vice President or members of their staff.
4. We have no suggestions for the President, Provost, or Senior Vice President or members of their staff as to how they might more effectively interact with our committee in the future, if necessary.

5. We have no additional information regarding interactions between our committee and the President, Provost, or Senior Vice President or members of their staff.