

## WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

### Recommendation

Students at St. Thomas will take four WAC-designated courses at various levels during their undergraduate careers: two *Writing Intensive* courses during the first two years, a *Writing to Learn* course during the second or third year, and a *Writing in the Discipline* (major field) course in the third or fourth year. The WAC courses and program will help to foster intellectual engagement at all levels of the curriculum, and will emphasize that writing is both a process and a craft. In encouraging students to engage writing as a process of learning, WAC will build a developmental framework that aids students in shaping scholarship in a variety of contexts. In emphasizing the nature of writing as a craft that is shaped over time, WAC will assist students in building a repertoire of writing strategies and skills, enhancing their ability to communicate meaningfully and effectively for a range of audiences.

### Rationale

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) is an approach to post-secondary instruction founded on the premise that writing assists students in understanding, ordering, and applying knowledge in all disciplines. In *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), John C. Bean has particularly linked writing with the development of critical thinking processes: "When we make students struggle with their writing we are making them struggle with thought itself." Within WAC programs, writing plays two critical roles as identified by Bean: writing is "a process of doing critical thinking and a product communicating the results of critical thinking."

*WAC promotes active learning based in inquiry and discovery.* Within WAC programs, students are encouraged to use writing to learn – as a means of constructing their knowledge, discovering what they don't know, and developing how they wish to respond to disciplinary content, problems, and issues.

*WAC promotes student engagement in the learning process.* According to findings from the Harvard Assessment Seminars (1992), "the relationship between the amount of writing for a course and students' level of engagement – whether engagement is measured by time spent on the course, or the intellectual challenge it presents, or students' self-reported level of interest in it – is stronger than any relationship we found between student engagement and any other course characteristic."<sup>5</sup>

*WAC promotes the development of students who communicate well in writing for both a variety of audiences and for a variety of purposes --* an increasingly important skill in today's world.

*WAC assists both students and faculty in integrating knowledge among various disciplines.* Students in WAC programs engage writing as a process of discovering, considering, and evaluating their choices as communicators, as situated in a variety of disciplinary discourses, throughout their college career.

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<sup>5</sup> As reported by the Center for Writing Excellence at West Virginia University, <http://www.as.wcu/~lbrady/workshop4a1.html>.

By facilitating a program that speaks to the value of writing in its many guises and throughout the disciplines, faculty express this shared value to our students. This is a powerful way to communicate with students about what is important in their development as learners.

A shared approach provides additional benefits for both students and faculty: it helps students to achieve a level of process integration throughout our undergraduate core curriculum that extends into major courses as well; and it helps faculty to reinforce the shared intellectual, philosophical, and practical goals at the heart of the core curriculum.

*WAC presents a model for student engagement that enhances other learning initiatives at the University of St. Thomas.* Writing Across the Curriculum complements Problem-Based, Inquiry-Based, and Community-Based approaches to learning, and therefore can serve as a means for assisting both students and faculty in building knowledge, skills, and experiences in a variety of educational contexts or locations.

*WAC reinforces the idea that writing is not a skill that is easily mastered, but it must be practiced throughout a student's four-year course of study.* Given the importance of writing as a vehicle for significant learning and the necessity for continuing development of the process of writing throughout a student's curriculum, the CCTF strongly supports the inclusion of a WAC program in the core curriculum. The WAC program must recognize writing education as a shared responsibility among faculty and reinforce five central principles of effective writing instruction:

- *Writing is a process, rather than a product, of learning.* Therefore, effective WAC courses offer opportunities for students to engage in activities fundamental to this process: invention, drafting, revision, and editing.
- *Writing is a means for engaging and assisting students throughout the learning process.* Therefore, effective WAC courses offer opportunities for students to perform both in-class and out-of-class writing activities.
- *Writing is a tool for exploring, developing, and solving problems.* Therefore, effective WAC courses encourage students to employ both informal and formal writing activities as a means for working with disciplinary content, ideas, and issues.
- *Writing is both a personal and a social activity.* Therefore, effective WAC courses offer opportunities for students to work both individually and collaboratively on writing projects.
- *Writing is a valuable means for evaluating student performance in a variety of courses.* Therefore, effective WAC courses reinforce the centrality of writing in assessment and grading strategies.

### **The WAC Program**

As highlighted above, effective WAC programs foster the relationships between writing and learning across disciplinary boundaries and skill levels. According to Muriel Harris, “beyond using writing as a way to measure or evaluate mastery of a subject and beyond grading writing as a means of improving grammatical proficiency, WAC promotes writing as a tool for learning and as a way to write and think in discipline-specific ways.”<sup>6</sup> With these ends in mind, we

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<sup>6</sup> Harris, Muriel. “A Writing Center Without a WAC Program: the De Facto WAC Center/Writing Center.” In *Writing Centers and Writing Across the Curriculum Programs: Building Interdisciplinary Partnerships*. Robert Barnett and Jacob Blumner, eds. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999.

recommend a WAC program at UST that infuses writing throughout the disciplines, drawing from the following models:

- *Writing Intensive* courses offer students substantive and direct instruction in the writing process, as a complement to specialized disciplinary content. Within the Writing Intensive classroom, students learn foundational concepts relevant to writing purposefully and effectively across the disciplines, while also learning foundational concepts in the discipline through their engagement in writing activities. Such courses employ pedagogical approaches attuned to student skill levels and designed to emphasize writing as a process, a practice, and a product.
- *Writing to Learn* is a pedagogical approach that offers students opportunities to write for the purposes of discovery and exploration, rather than mastery of a given subject matter. Pedagogy is focused on process rather than product, writer-based prose rather than reader-based prose, and the use of personal language and experience rather than objective terminology or outside research. The emphasis here is on frequent use of writing to explore ideas.
- *Writing in the Disciplines* is a pedagogical approach premised on the fact that different disciplines constitute knowledge and understanding in different ways, as evidenced and shaped by specialized conventions for writing and language use. This approach is “writing intensive”, in that it offers students focused and frequent practice in writing within particular disciplinary communities, for specialized disciplinary audiences, as expressed in disciplinary modes and genres. As such, it is primarily product-driven, reader-based, and reliant upon the use of credible disciplinary knowledge and research.

Drawing from these models, we propose that students will gain experience and skill as writers through completion of the following WAC requirements:

### **Writing Intensive (WI) Requirement**

*Number of Courses: 2 (must be in two different departments or programs)*

*When: First and Second Years (100- and 200-level courses in the Core Curriculum)*

*Maximum Class Size: 20 Students<sup>7</sup>*

Students will take two Writing Intensive courses embedded within the core curriculum, typically in their first and second years of study. We recognize that ENGL 110, 111, 112, and 190 – required of nearly all first-year students at St. Thomas – inherently function as Writing Intensive courses in their current form. Thus, completion of one of these courses will likely serve to fulfill one of the WI requirements for students. However, students must also take one additional course within another area of the core curriculum to successfully complete this requirement. In WI courses, students will be directly introduced to writing as a process and practice writing as a means of learning. To ensure that students have ample time to devote to this practice, we strongly recommend that students do not take two such courses concurrently.

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<sup>7</sup> This class size is drawn from guidelines for writing courses provided by the National Council of Teachers of English. In “More Than A Number: Why Class Size Matters,” the official NCTE position on class size and teacher workload, the guidelines state that “no more than 20 students should be permitted in any writing class. Ideally, classes should be limited to 15. . . . In sections larger than 20, teachers cannot possibly give student writing the immediate and individual response necessary for growth and improvement” (<http://www.ncte.org/about/over/positions/category/class/107620.htm>).

*Example:* An introductory-level course in which writing constitutes a substantial amount of the subject matter. Instructors will introduce students to the concept of writing as a process involving invention (using writing to generate and think through ideas), drafting, giving and receiving feedback on writing in consultation with others, substantial and recurrent revision, and proofreading. Class time will allow for the discussion of the writing process and provide opportunities for students to reflect upon the writing process (both orally and in writing). Students will receive formative feedback from their instructor on drafts undergoing revision as well as on final products. At least half of the grade for this course will be based on written assignments.

### **Writing To Learn (WTL) Requirement**

*Number of Courses: 1*

*When: Second and Third Years (200- and 300-level courses)*

*Maximum Class Size: 25 Students<sup>8</sup>*

Students will take one Writing to Learn course in either the core curriculum or the major, typically in their second and third years of study. In such courses, the focus is on employing writing as a means for building critical thinking and discovery. Within WTL courses, the writing process will not be explicitly taught (as in WI courses); however, such courses will be infused with Writing To Learn practices and pedagogies, as described earlier in this section.

*Example:* While writing is not explicitly taught, instructors of WTL courses will infuse the course with weekly activities that promote writing as a means for thinking critically. Within these classes, instructors will therefore facilitate the use of writing as a tool to develop ideas and process course material, while also promoting effective writing practices through drafting, feedback, revision, and reflection. The focus in these courses is on providing frequent, rather than formal, opportunities for students to engage in writing as a process of learning. Examples of such opportunities may include writing journals, logs, micro-themes, classroom writing assessments, and exploratory exercises.

### **Writing in the Discipline (WID) Requirement**

*Number of Courses: 1*

*When: Third and Fourth Years (300- and 400-level courses)*

*Maximum Class Size: 20 Students*

Students must take one WID course in their major, designed and taught by faculty in individual degree programs. In these courses, students will learn to write in the manner of those practicing in their field of study, and writing will develop in relation to context, in keeping with the particular purposes of their discipline. WID courses will also be writing intensive, as instructors will offer substantive and direct instruction in the writing process, in addition to specialized disciplinary content.

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<sup>8</sup> This number is adapted from the NCTE's guidelines regarding class size and teacher workload for discussion courses, where it is stated, "classes larger than 25 do not give students and teacher the opportunity to engage . . . texts through questions, discussion, and writing. If lecture classes must be offered, teachers should be given adjusted time or assistance to hold conferences and respond to students' writing" (<http://www.ncte.org/about/over/positions/category/class/107620.htm>).

*Example:* Instructors explicitly introduce students to the conventions of writing in their discipline and the rationale behind them. Students may analyze examples of published writing in terms of research methods, form, and substance. Students will also create substantial written projects that reflect the conversations, practices, and conventions characteristic of the field. At least half of the grade for this course will be based on written assignments.

### **The Issue of Correctness in Writing**

The primary purpose of the WAC proposal is to help students write in a manner that will serve the requirements of intellectual inquiry, exposition, and argumentation in the academic disciplines they study. Students need to recognize the particular ways in which the modes of thought and argumentation in each discipline shape the expectations for good writing. Students must also develop and maintain strong skills in grammatical correctness and in conventional uses of punctuation and format that are appropriate in academic writing. As students learn to write in various academic areas, they will encounter intellectual and conceptual challenges and they will make mistakes in areas of correctness. All faculty share responsibility for helping our students address these issues of correctness in their writing. The Core Curriculum Task Force has developed a short checklist of major problems encountered by student writers with a listing of solutions. The Undergraduate Core Curriculum Committee (UCCC) will work with the director of the WAC program to provide support to students and faculty in upholding clarity and sound fundamental skills in writing. The UCCC will also consider making the required reference work used by students in English 111 and English 190 available to all faculty as a way to involve faculty in supporting students as they develop their abilities as writers.

### **Administration of the WAC Program**

A successful WAC program at UST requires a WAC director, chosen from the pool of tenured faculty members, who will organize training and support for faculty and coordinate the efforts of a new WAC administrative committee. The WAC director will also serve on the new University Core Curriculum Committee (UCCC).

The WAC committee will approve WAC courses or “certify” WAC faculty. This group will also monitor WAC courses to assure ongoing quality, and possibly provide peer review for faculty.

The success of Writing Across the Curriculum at St. Thomas will depend very much on collaboration between the WAC director and committee, the UPPC, the Centers for Faculty Development and Writing, and individual departments across campus.

### **Implementation of the WAC Program**

Adequate funding is essential for the WAC program to operate successfully. Without funding, we risk adding to faculty burden and creating an unfunded mandate. We anticipate that substantial funding and support will therefore be needed in the following areas:

- Faculty education
- Course releases for WAC director
- Pay and training for peer consultants/teaching assistants in WID courses
- A facility and supplies for the WAC office (something akin to the Women’s Center, for example), which will house the WAC director and provide articles, books, handouts, and other resources for faculty
- Funding for an administrative assistant to the Director of WAC
- Online resources for WAC faculty and students

- Additional faculty members to accommodate reduced size of WAC-designated classes
- Assessment of the WAC program.

Additionally, we recommend that efforts in developing and teaching WAC courses be recognized and rewarded in year-end evaluations, perhaps including some sort of “Excellence in Teaching” Awards for WAC instructors.

In order to implement a successful WAC program at the University of St. Thomas, support for students, faculty and departments is imperative. Furthermore, faculty, departments, and a director of the program need to be given specific incentives to become fully engaged in a successful WAC initiative.

### **Students**

Students should be provided with clear instructions on how to successfully complete the WI, WTL, and WID requirements while enrolled at UST. Through clear requirements stated in the Catalog and the schedule and through consultation with advisors and administrators, they should see the WAC program’s vision and mission as part of a commitment UST has made to emphasize a culture of writing at the university. Incentives for students include an introduction to writing as a process early in their college careers, with continued practice in Writing to Learn methods in intermediate courses, and articulate and clear practice in their chosen fields as juniors and seniors. Students will also benefit from individual and ongoing support from peer consultants in the Center for Writing and from peer consultants/teaching assistants in their major fields.

### **Faculty**

Substantive workshops should be provided to introduce interested faculty to WAC and to help them create effective syllabi, assignments, and class activities employing WAC theory and practice. Additional workshops should focus on preparing WTL and WID courses. Follow-up workshops and meetings must be provided to ensure support for faculty as they continue to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of WAC in their courses. The workshops should be provided in the summers and over January terms, and should include stipends for faculty and staff.

Faculty and staff incentives to participate fully in Writing Across the Curriculum at UST should include the following:

- Paid workshops
- Follow-up seminars
- Smaller class sizes
- Ongoing support from the director and faculty WAC committee
- Online resources and support developed specifically for the WAC program at UST
- Peer consultant/undergraduate teaching assistants attached to their discipline-specific WID courses
- Recognition in annual reviews

Additional incentives for faculty and staff might also include release time, participation in WAC retreats, becoming a certified WAC instructor and opportunities for special recognition through peer review process.

### **Departments**

Department Chairs, in consultation with their faculty, will choose the course sections to be designated as Writing to Learn or Writing in the Discipline. Chairs will work closely with the Director of WAC and with the UPPC to help develop and designate courses as WI, WTL, or

WID. Incentives for departmental involvement in WAC include participation in a culture of writing in the liberal arts and in the development of effective professional writing in all disciplines. Smaller class sizes in course sections designated as WI, WTL, or WID will act as another strong incentive for WAC. Lastly, we believe that departments will benefit greatly from the provision of more intensive and purposeful writing preparation for their majors.

## **HUMAN DIVERSITY REQUIREMENT**

### **Recommendation**

The Core Curriculum Task Force recommends a refinement of the current Human Diversity Requirement. The CCTF accepts the recently revised criteria for human diversity course proposals (see Rationale, below) and recommends the following additions to Criteria One:

1. The conceptual understanding of human diversity includes race; ethnicity; gender; religion; class; sexual orientation; disability status; and geopolitical status.
2. At least two of the above areas of inquiry must be addressed in any course satisfying the diversity requirement.

The wording (in 1.) reflects the current principles used by the Department of English in defining marginality. The CCTF believes that these recommendations provide a more descriptive and inclusive definition of marginalized groups on our campus and in society.

Additionally, since a primary goal of the human diversity requirement is to eliminate ignorance and discrimination, the CCTF advocates early learning opportunities regarding diverse populations. Accordingly, the CCTF also makes this implementation recommendation:

3. Students should complete the human diversity requirement before their junior year.

### **Rationale**

In the initial deliberations of the Core Curriculum Task Force, members met with student, faculty, and staff groups to learn their perceptions of the current core curriculum. The human diversity requirement was frequently mentioned as a weakness: The focus on marginalized groups had become weak and diffuse, and the range of courses too broad and too removed from the issues of contemporary urban societies. Accordingly, the CCTF created a Human Diversity Auxiliary Task Force (ATF), to study the diversity requirement at the University of St. Thomas, and make appropriate recommendations.

During their discussions, it became clear to the ATF that the current Human Diversity Review Committee had recently completed its study responding to similar concerns. This study resulted in the development of six criteria that human diversity course proposals must meet. A human diversity course:

1. focuses on one or more of the following areas of inquiry: (a) racial and ethnic minorities; (b) class; (c) gender; (d) marginalized groups; (e) non-Western culture
2. assists students in understanding the perspectives, values, experiences, works and achievements of the peoples and cultures being studied; whenever possible it includes