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FINAL REPORT OF THE FACULTY SENATE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Faculty Senate Resolutions #90-7 through #90-19
Approved by the Faculty Senate: February 20, 1990
Approved by the Chancellor: March 5, 1990

TO: Faculty Senate of East Carolina University
FROM: Ad Hoc Committee on Writing Across the Curriculum
DATE: 13 January 1990
RE: Final Report

The attached report reflects nearly four years of research and investigation into the problems in student writing at East Carolina University and into the best remedies for those problems. We offer this report in the belief that East Carolina University desperately needs a university-wide writing program. At the same time, we hope the report that follows reflects our deep respect for the integrity of each department and unit in the university and our hope that each will find a way to incorporate writing into its curricula.

This report is respectfully submitted by the Faculty Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Writing Across the Curriculum, including its past and current membership:

Dr. Patrick Bizzaro, English, Director of Writing Across the Curriculum

Dr. Jo Allen, Director of the Writing Center, English
Dr. Genevieve Bartol, Nursing (past member)
Dr. John Carter, History (past member)
Dr. Robert Christian, Biology
Mr. Mark Coley, Medicine
Ms. Resa Crane-Rodger, English graduate student
Dr. Frances Daugherty, Art
Dr. Collett Dilworth, English
Mr. Jeff Eyerman, Student Government Association
Dr. Alton Finch, Technology (past member)
Dr. James W. Kirkland, English
Dr. Betty Levy, Education (past member)
Dr. John Longhill, Business (past member)
Dr. Richard Mauger, Geology
Dr. Nancy Mayberry, Foreign Languages and Literature
Dr. Richard McCarty, Philosophy
Dr. Richard Miller, Philosophy
Dr. Dorothy Muller, General College
Mr. Larry Neiman, Medicine (past member)
Ms. Pam Penland, Athletics
Dr. Roger Sharpe, Criminal Justice
Mr. Mel Stanforth, Art
Dr. Marion Sykes, University College
Dr. Steve Tacker, Psychology
Dr. Carol Thompson, Sociology and Anthropology
Dr. Robert Wendling, Leisure Systems Studies (past member)
Dr. Kenneth Wilburn, History
Dr. Tinsley Yarbrough, Political Science (past member)

THE WRITING PROBLEM

In April 1987, members of the Writing Center Steering Committee brought to the Senate's attention three disturbing facts:

- * Over a four-year period, nearly 40 % of all incoming freshmen were unable to demonstrate minimal writing competencies in placement essays written prior to enrollment in English 1100: Freshman Composition;
- * In a survey, 82 % of recent ECU graduates working at local businesses and industries indicated that they had not been instructed in writing since taking freshman composition; and
- * those same graduates spend 23 % of their worktime writing and 17 % reading the writing of others.

The Senate responded to this information by approving Resolution 87-12, which established the Ad Hoc Committee on Writing Across the Curriculum.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

The Senate developed the Ad Hoc Committee on Writing Across the Curriculum and charged it with the following four tasks:

- * to collect relevant information about research on writing
- * to study writing across the curriculum (hereafter WAC) programs in use at other institutions with student populations similar to the population at ECU
- * to analyze these findings and any other relevant data in light of the needs of ECU faculty and students
- * to make specific recommendations to the Senate for the development of a program in WAC so that the Senate can use the available information to decide if such a program can and should be instituted at East Carolina University

FINDINGS OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON WAC

The Committee was divided into four subcommittees to satisfy the Senate's charges.

Research on Writing One subcommittee set out to collect relevant information on research in writing. The subcommittee provided a working definition of what we mean by "writing across the curriculum": teacher's use of student writing in all disciplines as a means of (1) increasing learning and (2) improving students' writing ability. Numerous scholarly articles reported the success of writing as a means of helping students become better learners and on the value of employing writing to communicate learning in courses other than those offered by the Department of English.

WAC at Institutions Similar to ECU A second subcommittee surveyed programs in WAC at nine institutions similar to East Carolina University. Each offers some systematic form of remediation, as we already do at ECU, and five of them run an active program in WAC administered through the Department of English, the Vice Chancellor's office, or through a General College structure. Seven of the nine programs offer writing-intensive courses (often in the students' majors), have a director for the program, and assign to a committee the task of approving or disapproving syllabuses for those courses. The biggest problem in instituting such a program seems to be maintaining faculty interest beyond the first or second year. Faculty need to be rewarded for obtaining new skills and for experimenting with the uses of writing-to-learn strategies.

Attitudes of ECU Faculty toward WAC A third subcommittee surveyed faculty at ECU to determine their interest in a WAC program. On the whole, responses to the questionnaire suggest that the faculty recognizes a significant problem with student writing and is willing to address the problem directly, in their classrooms. Most would be willing to participate in such a program, at least initially, if provided appropriate time and student-teacher ratios.

Attitudes of ECU Students toward WAC A fourth subcommittee surveyed students at ECU. Generally, students express a concern that the university should do more to help them develop their writing skills.

PILOT STUDIES

At its January 1989 meeting, the Ad Hoc Committee on Writing Across the Curriculum recommended to the Senate that pilot Studies of WAC be run to further examine the ways writing might be used in classrooms with ECU students. At that time, Acting Vice Chancellor Bloodworth provided the committee with enough funding to support four pilot studies, which have since been completed.

As announced in the October 1989 Senate meeting, the participants in the studies--Drs. Muller (General College), Wilburn (History), Sharpe (Criminal Justice), McCarty (Philosophy), and Thompson (Sociology and Anthropology)--incorporated writing into their teaching in an effort to find out how well writing works as a method for improving student learning and writing.

The results of those studies, lending support as we might have suspected to the well-documented successes of WAC programs across the country, suggest that teaching strategies involving the use of writing can be implemented with relative ease and will result in improvements in student writing and learning, depending on the kind of learning desired.

CONCLUSIONS

We can conclude from our four years' study that one method to attack the problem of poor writing and learning among students is by instituting a program in WAC. More specifically, we conclude the following:

1. that writing skills among many incoming ECU students are unsatisfactory
2. that writing skills among many graduating ECU students are unsatisfactory
3. that WAC is a method used nationally--including in various ways at each of the nine institutions identified by the WAC committee as being similar to ECU--to combat weak writing among students
4. that WAC has the additional benefit of helping students become better learners
5. that from all reports--published research as well as our own pilot studies--WAC works, provided classes are carefully designed to achieve the desired results
6. that from all reports, faculty, students, and administrators at ECU support a program in WAC
7. that any program should provide various options to faculty who choose to be involved; the more options available (including the option not to participate at all), the more popular the program
8. that incentives should be made available to reward faculty for learning new skills and experimenting with the use of writing in their classes; incentives will help combat attrition that has set in at other institutions using WAC
9. that, as a university program, WAC should be housed outside the English Department
10. that, eventually, the program must have a staff and a cross-disciplinary organizational structure
11. that workshops, conferences, and tutorial training sessions are excellent means for preparing faculty to use writing in their classes

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ad Hoc Committee on WAC recommends the following:

1. that the Senate support efforts to develop multi-disciplinary and multicultural initiatives, such as Writing Across the Curriculum
2. that the Senate recognize that some incoming students at ECU lack the kinds of writing skills they will need both as students and, once graduated, as professionals
3. that the Senate support the principle that writing can and may be used in classes throughout the university to help students become better learners and improved writers
4. that the involvement of faculty in a WAC program be optional
5. that faculty who participate in a WAC program be justly rewarded for their efforts
6. that since WAC can include a variety of uses of writing, that any program present teachers with options for the way they might use writing in their classes and train them to employ those options
7. that WAC be developed by beginning with existing programs, such as the Writing Center, and with courses which currently use writing
8. that a support system for WAC be built as soon as possible into the Writing Center so that the program can begin as early as fall 1990
9. that a committee be appointed by the current Director of WAC to continue the task of developing WAC in cooperation with the office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
10. that changes in student writing and learning as a product of WAC be studied over the next three years
11. that any changes in curricula as a product of WAC be carried out through established committees
12. that WAC should be under the auspices of the office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Resolution #92-17 (included in the Curriculum Committee Minutes of March 26, 1992.)

Approved by the Faculty Senate: April 14, 1992

Approved by the Chancellor: April 29, 1992

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY PROGRAM IN WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

A PROPOSAL SUBMITTED BY THE WAC COMMITTEE

INTRODUCTION

This proposal for a Writing Across the Curriculum (hereafter, WAC) Program at East Carolina University includes (I) writing-intensive course models (hereafter W-I), (II) program implementation, (III) program administration, (IV) program evaluation, and (V) support.

I. WRITING-INTENSIVE COURSE GUIDELINES

The models that follow, intended to serve as guidelines for W-I courses, provide a general idea of the types and amount of writing that ideally should be incorporated in W-I courses. Remember: the following are guidelines for W-I course development not hard-and-fast requirements. These models are based on the belief (1) that writing is closely related to thinking in any discipline and (2) that writing is, in fact, a process. If none of the models is appropriate, a new model may be suggested in developing a course.

Please also note that the general designation, W-I COURSE, applies equally to courses or sections of courses employing the W-I approach. Given the current status of writing in the university, there is very little need for the development of new courses to accommodate a writing emphasis; special, designated sections of certain courses may be used as W-I courses. The WAC committee will work, as necessary, with individual departments in devising WI courses or sections of courses.

MODEL ONE: W-I COURSES EMPHASIZING ACADEMIC WRITING

This model employs the kinds of writing tasks most often required of students in college and taught in the English 1100 and 1200 sequence. These tasks include research papers, essays in various modes, summaries and abstracts of texts, critiques of texts, and various kinds of reports (e.g., book reviews).

The following academic writing assignments--or variations of them--would be perfectly acceptable uses of academic writing in a W-I course.

- o 1 research paper of 10-15 pages, written in multiple drafts, and 2 short "preparation" papers such as summaries, critiques, and syntheses of source materials (2-3 pages each)
- o OR, 4-5 short papers (of 3-5 pages each), in multiple drafts, summarizing, critiquing, or synthesizing course reading materials
- o OR, 2 book reviews, 2 magazine article reviews (of 3-5 pages each), in multiple drafts, and a short position paper (of 5 pages) based upon the reviews

- o OR, 4-5 short papers in rhetorical modes (e.g., one description, one comparison/contrast, one personal experience, one opinion, and one persuasion)
- o OR, any other comparable assignments totaling approximately 20-25 pages of EDITED academic writing

MODEL TWO: W-I COURSES EMPHASIZING PROFESSIONAL WRITING

This option differs from W-I courses emphasizing academic writing primarily in the kind of texts students will be required to write. Naturally, there may be some carry-over from one emphasis to another; skills such as summarizing, critiquing, and synthesizing tend to be useful in the writing of professional documents as well as in the writing of academic texts.

This option also differs from academic options insofar as the kinds of texts students may be asked to write are often unique to a discipline (e.g., Therapeutic Recreation Assessments or Analytical Validations). As a result, faculty may find it necessary to determine first what graduates are actually required to write on the job before employing this option.

Some departments have required that their students take Engl 3880 (Writing for Business and Industry) or Engl 3820 (Scientific Writing), both emphasizing professional writing. Since students are required to take "at least three hours of W-I courses in their major" those departments which currently (as of spring 1992) require that their students take Engl 3880 and Engl 3820 may continue to use those courses as W-I courses, but must develop a minimum of one other course or course section from among their content-specific offerings.

The following professional writing assignments--or variations of them--would be perfectly acceptable uses of professional writing in a W-I course.

- o 1 professional report of 10-15 pages, in multiple drafts, and 2 short "preparation" writings, such as critiques, summaries, syntheses, lab reports, memos, letters, etc.
- o OR, 4-5 short writing assignments (3-5 pages each), written in multiple drafts, including memos; letters; lab reports; summaries, critiques, and syntheses of reading assignments; or any other writing assignment of 3-5 pages appropriate to a specific department or discipline
- o OR, any other comparable assignments totaling approximately 20-25 pages of EDITED professional writing

MODEL THREE: W-I COURSES EMPHASIZING WRITING TO LEARN

Writing-to-learn strategies focus principally on the use of writing to help students master course materials. This emphasis is appropriate in every subject area, including mathematics and science.

The following writing-to-learn assignments--or variations of them-- would be perfectly acceptable uses of writing to learn in a W-I course.

- o the use of a journal in which students write responses to various reading assignments (50-60 pages of reflective writing checked periodically by the instructor)
- o the use of note cards by students during class to record answers to various kinds of questions the teacher asks (this must be done regularly to be effective) in addition to out-of-class journal pieces written in response to selected reading assignments
- o a split-entry journal in which students summarize a reading assignment on one side of the page and write a personal response to the reading on the other side of the page (50-60 pages of such reflection checked periodically by the instructor)
- o OR, any other comparable set of assignments designed to systematically employ writing as a method of reflecting on required material totalling 50-60 pages of unedited reflective writing

MODEL FOUR: W-I COURSES EMPHASIZING A COMBINATION OF WRITING APPROACHES

This option is the logical extension of the other three. It is possible for a faculty member to combine academic, professional, and reflective (i.e., writing to learn) writing activities in a single course. The goal is to achieve an amount of writing equivalent to the amount suggested above: 20-25 pages of edited professional or academic writing or 50-60 pages of unedited reflective writing. Here are some examples of assignment combinations that would be perfectly acceptable in a W-I course.

- o 30 pages of journal writing in combination with 10-12 total pages of edited academic or professional writing (see descriptions above)
- o OR, 15 pages of journal writing in combination with 15-18 total pages of edited academic or professional writing
- o OR, 45 pages of journal writing in combination with 5-6 total pages of edited academic or professional writing
- o OR, any other comparable assignments totaling approximately the equivalent, as indicated in the three above examples, of 50-60 pages of unedited reflective writing or 20-25 pages of edited academic or professional writing, or a combination of the two kinds of writing in proportion

MODEL FIVE: W-I COURSES EMPHASIZING COLLABORATION

By "collaboration" we mean the joining together of two or more faculty members in the teaching of a single course. Precedent for collaboration can be found in ECU's Honors Program and Women's Studies Program.

In the WAC Program, collaboration refers to (1) faculty from a department or unit in the university team teaching a course in that department or unit with a member of Department of English's writing faculty or (2) a department other than the English Department reserving a section of Engl 3880 or Engl 3820 to be team taught with a member of the English Department to majors in that department.

Arrangements must be made, of course, between the two departments and approved by the WAC Committee.

II. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

A. Courses currently offered that fall within one of the writing-intensive course models listed above will be identified and listed as writing-intensive courses.

B. Additional course proposals that meet writing-intensive course models will be approved when adhering to the following tenets:

- At least two semesters before the course will be offered for WI credit, faculty should submit to the appropriate chair or dean proposals of courses or sections of courses to be designated W-I.
- The unit head should then recommend appropriate proposal(s) to the WAC committee with a letter of support.

C. The WAC committee will consider new W-I course proposals submitted and notify the appropriate offices of approved courses prior to the submission of those proposals through the usual curriculum channels.

PHASE ONE (FALL 1992-SUMMER 1993)

Students who enter the university during this phase of the program will not be required to take any W-I courses although individual departments may encourage students to take such courses. The WAC Committee will use this time to (1) identify courses or sections of courses throughout the university that would already qualify as W-I; (2) plan and conduct workshops for faculty interested in developing or teaching W-I courses; (3) institute a formal system for approving new W-I courses (4) continue working with the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs to build a sound, adequately funded administrative structure for the WAC program.

PHASE TWO (FALL 1993)

Students entering the university as freshmen in the fall of 1993 or any semester thereafter will be required to take a minimum of 12 hours of W-I courses, including 6 hours of composition (English 1100 and 1200) and at least 3 hours of W-I courses in their major, in order to graduate. Individual departments may require more than the minimum number of W-I courses.

PHASE THREE (FALL 1995)

Transfer students entering the university in the fall of 1995 or any semester thereafter will be subject to the W-I requirements described in Phase Two. Decisions about whether a student should be given credit for a W-I course taken at another institution will be made by the appropriate unit in accordance with procedures currently used for approving other types of transfer credit. An on-campus writing sample will be used, whenever necessary, to determine a student's competence as a writer and whether that student needs more work in writing.

III. PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

The WAC Committee will be made up of the director, who will serve as chair; the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (or a representative); the Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences (or a representative); the Director of Composition; the Director of the Writing Center; and 8-10 faculty elected to serve on the committee by the Faculty Senate. The committee will work closely with the Director of the WAC Program to maintain the overall integrity of the program. To this end, the following will be addressed.

- o Recommend the policies governing the development and offering of courses and seminars that are officially designated as writing-intensive courses
- o Approve and recommend, through the university's normal channels curriculum, changes in the WAC Program
- o Recommend semester course offerings to the Director of WAC Program
- o Advise the Director on all aspects of the Writing Across the Curriculum Program

Once departments have designed courses or sections of courses following the models, "Writing-Intensive Course Models," and have had proposals (a syllabus and some brief description of writing assignments will suffice) for those courses or sections of courses approved by the WAC Committee, the departments will have officially become members of the ECU WAC Program.

To assure smooth and continuing operation of the WAC Program, faculty interested in teaching a W-I course should attend a workshop on the WAC program. Such workshops will be run at regular intervals publicized each semester by the Director of WAC, in consultation with various other faculty members who have previously taught W-I courses.

Additionally, the WAC Committee should conduct orientation meetings for faculty participating in the WAC Program prior to the semester in which the W-I section is to be taught. These orientation meetings will differ from workshops primarily in what they hope to accomplish: WORKSHOPS will present faculty with current research on writing and learning; ORIENTATION MEETINGS will provide historical and pedagogical background to the ECU WAC Program. In both kinds of sessions, encouragement will come from faculty who have taught W-I courses in the university.

IV. PROGRAM EVALUATION

The Committee on Writing Across the Curriculum will have an ongoing concern with how the program is succeeding. To this end the committee will initiate a four-phase method of assessment which will include 1) student evaluations of writing-intensive courses, 2) assessment of student performance, 3) survey of student attitudes toward the WAC Program, and 4) survey of faculty satisfaction with the WAC Program. Additionally, to assess achievement in writing, the committee will design and implement experimental research of selected courses or sections taught by professors interested in participating in such studies. The intent is to fund four such assessment projects per year. Furthermore, departments will be encouraged to develop their own program assessment efforts particularly after the initial three years of the WAC program.

V. PROGRAMS IN SUPPORT OF W-I COURSES

The following are programs currently in place that will support the writing across the curriculum program.

SUPPORT PROGRAM ONE: THE WRITING CENTER

A department may assign one of its graduate assistants or majors to the Writing Center where, after receiving training in methods of tutoring students in writing, the tutors will be available during specified hours to work with students from their "home" departments.

SUPPORT PROGRAM TWO: WRITER'S WORKBENCH

This computerized style analyzer can be used to assist students in the drafting of academic or professional documents.