

## Writing Advisory Committee (WAC)

Ad hoc Committee of UW Tacoma Academic Policy and Curriculum Committee

### **Vision**

To make the ten W-course credits meaningful and purposeful for students

### **Charge**

Under the authority of the APCC, the Writing Advisory Council (WAC) will develop guidelines intended to offer support for faculty and units to deliver more consistent and integrated discipline-based W-course instruction that is informed by good writing pedagogy and is aligned with the university's mission and values of access and excellence.

### **Process**

Phase 1: Data Collection

Members of the WAC conducted focus groups and surveys with relevant stakeholders

- a. Faculty
  - i. NHCL – 10 focus group participants
  - ii. SWCJ – 14 survey responses; 4 focus group participants
  - iii. Institute – 6 survey responses
  - iv. Milgard – 8 survey responses
  - v. Urban Studies – 10 faculty focus group participants
  - vi. SIAS – 35 focus group participants
  - vii. Education – No data (no undergraduate program)
- b. Students – 174 respondents completed the online survey
- c. Staff
  - i. Librarians – 5 focus group participants
  - ii. Writing Professional Staff – 4 focus group participants

Phase 2: Data Analysis

Phase 3: Draft Guidelines and Recommendations submitted to APCC for feedback

Phase 4: Final guidelines and recommendations submitted to APCC

As illustrated by the above-described process, the Writing Advisory Committee collected data from a range of stakeholders. The guidelines and recommendations presented below are grounded in the findings of our data collection and analysis efforts, and informed by writing pedagogy. The findings are presented in the next section, followed by our proposed guidelines for W courses and recommendations for supporting faculty in implementing these guidelines.

## **Findings**

### **Student Survey (n=174):**

- Data from the student survey suggest that students are very satisfied with the work that UW Tacoma faculty do to improve and support their writing, but that they wanted more preparation in writing for future careers.
  - While 80% (n=139) of students agreed that their W-courses prepared them for writing in their disciplines, slightly fewer (69%, n=120) agreed that their courses prepared them for writing in their future careers.
- 91% (n=159) of respondents indicated that they are either somewhat or very satisfied with their current ability to express themselves in writing.
- Students highly value discipline specific writing skills.
- Students most often reported that multiple ungraded drafts, peer review of assignments, and reflective writing helped improve their writing.
- Only 13% (n=23) and 18% (n=32) of students stated that W courses had helped them develop skills in digital literacy and visual literacy respectively compared to 30% (n=53) for information literacy.

### **Faculty Surveys and Focus Groups (n=88):**

- Not all faculty have a clear understanding of the distinctions between writing in courses across the curriculum and their roles in offering specific types of writing courses. In other words, there is confusion around W courses (W), Composition courses (C), and other courses with heavy writing expectations.
- Current W-course policy is too limiting and does not give value to the varied kinds of work that teaches and enhances writing skills across academic units. To that end, W courses do not support the types of writing requirements in all disciplines, i.e., process documentation, engineering procedures, technical documents, etc...
- There is real difficulty in meeting the current W-course requirements and content area needs in the same course over a 10-week quarter.
- There is a lack of training and support for faculty teaching W courses.
- Faculty expressed concerns over the basic writing skills in their existing students.
- Faculty did not identify digital literacy as a concern in teaching W courses.

### **Staff Focus Group:**

- Library and TLC staff are capable and enthusiastic about supporting faculty in the development, teaching, and assessment of W courses.

## **Conclusion**

There is a mis-match between faculty and student expectations in writing, especially in writing for a future career inside a discipline and in the literacies needed for contemporary writing practice (e.g. digital literacy). To the extent that they exist, current UW Tacoma W-course policies do not align with evidence-based writing pedagogy. Nor are they clearly connected to the mission and values of UW Tacoma, including the values of excellence, community, diversity, innovation, and access. In addition, current W-course policies are overly rigid and may burden faculty, students and staff with unnecessary restrictions or processes in terms of the varied ways in which writing pedagogy can be tailored within and articulated across disciplines.

There is a need, therefore, to engage multiple stakeholders (e.g., faculty, students, staff, employers, alumni, and community members) in ongoing conversations about defining and analyzing expectations around writing. These conversations should occur within academic units with an emphasis on discipline-specific variations to develop W-course guidelines that empower academic units to define and assess writing for themselves. These expectations should be aligned within a broad, flexible framework that transforms the existing rigid requirements for W courses.

### **W-Course Guidelines**

All W courses at UW Tacoma will:

- (1) Clearly articulate the roles that student writing plays in their discipline/major and relevant professions.**
  - (a) Rationale: W courses are intended to deepen students' understanding and practice of good writing within their major in ways that are relevant to their potential future careers or continued studies (e.g., graduate school).
- (2) Employ writing practices that are appropriate for and aligned with good writing within their discipline/major and that will enhance communicative activities likely to be used beyond students' university experience.**
  - (a) Rationale: W course policies should recognize and value the varied kinds of work that teaches and enhances writing skills and the varied types of writing across academic units and disciplines/majors.
- (3) Include purposefully designed writing processes that include scaffolding of assignments, helping students understand expectations of the writing asked of them, guidance through peer-feedback processes, and/or feedback on non-graded drafts by the teacher.**
  - (a) Rationale: Writing assignments that incorporate the above-named processes both reflect good writing pedagogy and attend to the needs of students as articulated in their survey responses.
- (4) Include appropriate mechanism(s) for assessing student writing aligned with items 1-3 above.**
  - (a) Rationale: Assessment of writing processes in W courses must help students develop their writing and meet course learning outcomes.
  - (b) Rationale: Writing assessment has the potential to reinforce structural bias and create uneven and unintentional harm (i.e. cultural or gender bias, etc.).
  - (c) Rationale: Assessment mechanisms must be explicit and shared with APCC and will be used to conduct ongoing, periodic review of W courses at UW Tacoma. Similar to the need to ensure consistent implementation of the Diversity Designation Policy, the APCC has a responsibility to students to oversee W courses and ensure consistent implementation of these guidelines.
- (5) Be eligible for review by an APCC-appointed committee every three years, beginning in Autumn 2020.** Described in more detail below.

## Implementation

1. In 2018-2019, APCC will appoint a special W committee to assure and support policy implementation. This charge will include acting on the "Recommendations for Supporting Development and Delivery of W Courses" articulated below. This committee will consult with the Director of Writing Program and other designees responsible for writing support (e.g. TLC, Library, & IT) in this process.
2. Academic units (preferably at the level of individual major) will identify and define W-course goals, structure, and assessment framework(s) for themselves in alignment with these guidelines and using Appendix A: W-Course Development Faculty Heuristic.
3. By March 2019, academic units (preferably at the level of individual major) will submit their W-course goals, structure, and assessment framework(s) to APCC.
4. On a three-year rotation, beginning in Autumn 2020, APCC will conduct a randomized review of twelve W-course offerings at UW Tacoma and compare these to academic unit W-course goals and structure. Academic units will be asked to
  1. Submit the most recent syllabus
  2. Submit the W Course related question responses portion of the course assessments and/or the course evaluations, and
  3. Submit the contact information of the faculty who taught this course most recently
    - a. The faculty member who taught the course most recently will be asked by the APCC to describe how the academic unit w-course goals and structure were put into practice in their course.

## Recommendations for Academic Units

1. **Class sizes should reflect best practices for writing-intensive courses.**
2. Identify and define major-specific or unit-specific W-course goals in accordance with the above "W-Course Guidelines" using available campus supports (see below) as needed (see also, Appendix A: W-Course Development Faculty Heuristic).
3. Determine process for ongoing internal review and discussions of established W-course goals.
4. Determine process for collecting and maintaining relevant data required by 3-year APCC W-course review (see Implementation: Item 4).

## Suggested Charge to 2018-19 APCC/WAC Committee

1. Develop resources for academic units to support W-course development and delivery (e.g. handouts that define best practices and good writing pedagogy).
2. Reach out to academic units to support development and delivery of W-Courses.
3. Review and provide quality assurance for unit-based W-course goals, etc.
4. Advise APCC on their advocacy to campus leadership (e.g., EC, EBC, Chancellor) regarding campus-wide support outlined below.
5. Continued collection of data from stakeholders regarding writing (e.g., employers, alumni, students, faculty, staff).

## Recommendations for Campus-Wide Support

1. Consistent and continuous institutionally supported training **MUST** be offered to UW Tacoma faculty in the development of W courses. This can be modeled on the previously

offered Writing Fellows or the currently used iTech model that requires faculty to be trained to teach online courses through a shared-cost professional development framework. Training would focus on:

- a. Development of scaffolded writing assignments
  - b. Providing efficient and impactful feedback to students
  - c. Time management within W courses
  - d. Assessment of writing in W courses
  - e. Teaching practices for digital, information, and visual literacy
2. Expand institutional support for enhanced TLC and library involvement in syllabus and writing assignment design, including embedded tutoring for W courses.
  3. Expand institutional support for enhanced TLC, library, and Information Technology involvement in Visual, Information, and Digital literacy.

### **Appendix A: W-Course Development Faculty Heuristic**

The following is offered as a generative heuristic for each academic unit in order for them to make clear what W courses are in their major(s), the scope of the kinds of writing practices they aim to offer students and why those practices are important, and how to accomplish those learning goals within that academic unit's unique set of courses and disciplinary and professional needs. Because each academic unit and major does not share exactly the same learning goals, disciplinary practices, and professional expectations, these guidelines are meant to help units to have on-going, pointed discussions about how writing is assigned, taught, and assessed in their W courses (or all courses). It is strongly recommended that such efforts are conducted at the level of individual majors to the extent possible. Each set of questions is aligned with an aspect of UW Tacoma's (proposed) W Course Guidelines.

1. **Clearly articulate the roles that student writing plays in their discipline/major and relevant professions.**
  - What kinds of writing ideally do you think students need to practice in your W courses? Why?
  - How are writing practices in your W courses used?
  - What kind of writing practices are students asked to engage in?
    - What are those practices intended to do for students?
  - Is writing used to learn, think about, or reflect upon things?
  - Is it used to demonstrate knowledge or the application of knowledge?
  - Does one kind of writing assignment attempt to engage students in too many things (does it have too many purposes)?
2. **Employ writing practices that are appropriate for and aligned with good writing within their discipline/major and that will enhance communicative activities likely to be used beyond students' university experience.**
  - How many different kinds of writing tasks/practices might you incorporate in your W courses?
  - How would those writing assignments and assessments be different from each other?

- Do students have options for meeting various writing assignments?
- Must they all write in the same ways (employ the same genres or types of writing)?
  - If so, why and what do those mandatory ways offer students in each class?
  - How do you know that those genres or kinds of writing afford the learning outcomes you attribute to them?

**3. Include purposefully designed writing processes that include scaffolding of assignments.**

- How is each writing assignment given to students?
- Are processes and guidelines offered well in advance?
- Do students have an opportunity to help articulate assignments and their expectations?
- How are students guided in the course through appropriate or effective writing processes for the discipline?
- How do those processes help students build drafts or documents that the course/instructor expects?
- What kind of feedback is given to students before a grade is determined?
- Do students have a chance to offer feedback on drafts with guidance in how to engage in those feedback processes?
- How are students taught to read colleagues' drafts with particular expectations in mind and articulate feedback?
- How is each writing assignment or practice graded?
- Do all writing practices need to be graded? Why?
- Are there ways to minimize the grading of writing and maximize other richer forms of feedback that are more formative?

**4. Include a mechanism for assessing student writing.**

- How might you use the already organically generated writing in existing W courses to learn what students are capable of doing in writing?
- What kind of information do you need to know about your students' writing in W courses?
- What kinds of evidence about students' writing practices do you need in order to answer your questions about their writing practices?
- How might you include a writing related question in the course evaluation that correlates to the discipline-specific writing criteria identified in items 1-3 (above)?