

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM
Assessment Report: General Education Component Area
April 1, 2006

I. ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

A. COMPONENT AREA GOALS.

Because a pilot assessment project report was mistakenly taken as indicating the goals for all writing across the curriculum courses and because the various kinds of assessment data collected in previous years gave interesting results but did not clearly indicate what should be done to revise the program, the WAC program worked on re-defining the central learning outcomes and decided to implement a temporary one year program of syllabus audit to determine the future directions of assessment. The Marshall University WAC program has six learning outcome goals, which look in two different directions, three toward faculty and three toward students.

Faculty Goals/Learning Outcomes: Since the WAC program asks faculty to use research-based pedagogy, already shown to be effective in increasing student learning and writing, one set of learning outcomes is for faculty development purposes:

1. WI Faculty will be able to design instruction that implements writing to learn and writing to think critically pedagogy.
2. WI Faculty will be able to implement teaching writing pedagogy that involves designing a multi-stage process, prompt feedback, revision, and rubric-based evaluation for writing projects
3. WI Faculty will engage in reflective practice, researching, analyzing, and revising pedagogical practice using writing in the classroom.

Student Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will develop the ability to think critically about a subject area through writing.
2. Students will enhance their abilities to write in multiple genres for multiple purposes and audiences and their knowledge of writing conventions
3. Students will develop multiple strategies for writing and multiple methods for managing their writing processes.

B. LEARNING OUTCOMES/COMPETENCES & DATA COLLECTION

The pedagogies described as learning outcomes for faculty are research-based practices, confirmed by findings in the fields of rhetoric and composition and educational research. Basically this research (See John Bean. Engaging Ideas The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001; "Research Matters: What Are the Effects of Writing-to-Learn Programs?" English Journal. No. 95, No. 2 November 2005: 97-100; Gail F. Hughes. "The Need for Clear Purposes and New Approaches to the Evaluation of Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Programs." in Assessment of Writing: Politics, Policies, Practices. Ed. By Edward White et. al. New York: MLA, 1996: 158-173.) indicates that students learn to think and grasp a discipline's concepts through consistent, multiple, spaced out, brief writings and metacognitive writing and that students learn to write more

effectively through consistent writing practice, shorter writing assignments or larger projects broken into smaller parts, prompt feedback, revision instruction and opportunities, and developing awareness of writing processes and conventions of multiple genres of writing (metacognition).

In order to determine if our students' critical thinking and writing to communicate are being enhanced by WAC courses, we needed to determine if WAC courses were being taught using the research based WAC principles. Therefore, we decided to use a system used by George Mason University, a syllabus audit. In the Spring and Fall of 2005, a graduate assistant reviewed all the WI syllabi turned into the WAC office, using the following grid, based on what research says works and the WAC program requires WAC courses practice, to determine if these pedagogies were being implemented:

Class: Teacher:

Is improvement of writing a course objective?	
What are the formal writing assignments?	
What kinds and amount of informal writing are used (graded/un-graded/combination)?	
Is writing spread throughout the semester?	
Is the student guided through the writing process?	
Is at least one piece of formal writing revised?	
Is writing essential to, integral to learning the course content?	

RESULTS:

Total Number of spring and fall syllabi reviewed: 127

No problems: 85

One problem: 28

Two problems: 7

Three problems: 4

Four problems: 3

Problem areas:

7 syllabi did not list improving or enhancing writing as a course objective

2 syllabi did not make clear what the formal writing assignments were

4 did not make clear what the informal writing would be or how used

2 did not spread writing out throughout the semester

9 did not indicate students would be guided through the writing process

33 did not seem to emphasize revision

4 did not demonstrate that the writing was essential to or integral to learning course content and thinking

Our Conclusions:

1. Many of the deficiencies were in multiple sections of one course, a WI designated capstone course. The course itself carries WI designation. We need to address the instructors of these courses and the colleges/

departments to make sure that WAC pedagogy is being implemented in courses carrying a WI designation.

2. WAC objectives need to become clearer and more measurable, with writing to think and writing to communicate enhancement central to all syllabi. We need to revise the course syllabus outline for WAC and how it is meeting general education core outcomes in communications skills and in critical thinking.
3. Revision needs to become central to all WI syllabi and practice. We will need to enhance faculty understanding of how to elicit and teach revision.
4. We then need to find ways to assess student learning outcomes across the WAC program in classes that are clearly following the WAC pedagogies to determine the level of critical thinking and writing outcome achievements.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO IMPROVE

1. The WAC Director conferred with the faculty and dean of the college with the problematic WI course. Immediate and effective action was taken to remedy this problem. We will review the syllabi in spring 06 to make sure the course of action executed worked.

2. We will conduct syllabi audits in the beginning of each semester and address any problems then, to correct the problems or to get additional information.

3. Having insured that WI teachers are using WI pedagogy reflectively through syllabus audit and re-certification procedures, we will start designing some indirect student and faculty questionnaires based on Larry Beason and Laural Darrow article "Listening as Assessment: How students and Teachers Evaluate WAC" in Assessing Writing Across the Curriculum: Diverse Approaches & Practices. Eds. Brian Huot and Kathleen Blake-Yancey. Greenwich, CT: Ablex, 1997: 91-121. We may also use a variation on pre-post attitudes towards writing and the writing process questionnaire developed by William Strong. These measures will show students' perceptions about writing and the writing process.

4. Having insured that WI courses are using WI pedagogy, we are in a better position to develop some direct measures of desired student outcomes in course based research designs based on the work of Barbara Walvrod. Assessment Clear and Simple. A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.

II. SENATE BILL 653 COMPLIANCE

As all WAC Directors have said before me, there is no single national and international benchmark for critical thinking in the wide variety of disciplines using WI pedagogy, nor a single benchmark for the increasingly wide variety of writing in the disciplines. The project we piloted using the 6 plus one traits showed improvement in all the areas because of revision, but those traits do not apply to all types of writing (nor even most) and do not measure the level of critical thinking or content learning that resulted from using writing as a learning, as a well as a communicating, tool. Thus, we

need to devise an assessment model that will directly measure our revised student learning outcomes, having found an assessment model to measure faculty development outcomes.

III. PLANS FOR CURRENT YEAR 2006

To meet faculty development outcomes, our plans for the current year include continuing the syllabi audit, moving it to the beginning of the semester, and providing feedback to instructors whose syllabi indicate problems. We will also institute workshops, starting with revision, to provide further faculty development beyond our fall and spring workshops. In addition, we will change re-certification to encourage more reflective engagement with WI pedagogy.

Having insured the use of WAC pedagogy, we are planning two new types of questionnaires (indirect measures) to meet revised student learning outcome 3 (knowledge of and ability to management writing process and conventions).

Having insured the use of WAC pedagogy, we are going to work on developing a rotating group of course-based direct measures of student achievement, using the Walvood model, or try a metacognitive assignment that crosses disciplinary lines, or try to coordinate larger scale university wide assessment with the WI component.

IV. ASSISTANCE NEEDED

Support to develop direct student learning measures is needed. I plan to attend a WAC workshop on assessment, but some kind of support (incentive, training, bringing in a consultant) is needed to encourage WAC faculty to undertake all this work. Large-scale pre-post studies or portfolios or how students who take a WI course differ from those that don't on a national test that would show the role WAC plays in enhancing student writing and critical thinking require a budget, significant support in data collection and interpretation, and professional development beyond the scope of the WAC program or the WAC Director as now constituted. As previous directors have said, WAC graduate assistants are not trained in data collection and analysis (and neither is this WAC director). Any assistance in designing effective assessment would be much appreciated.

VI. WHAT ONE MOST IMPORTANT THING HAS THE COMPONENT AREA LEARNED THROUGH THIS PROCESS?

We learned that we need to clearly define our learning outcomes, to revise and refine them, so we can measure them. We needed to do that revision and make sure we are meeting the faculty outcomes before we can measure student outcomes.

Marshall University

Assessment of Student Outcomes: Component/Course/Program Level

Component Area/Program/Discipline: _____ **YEAR:** _____

This form will not fit what WAC did during 2005 for assessment purposes. See WAC Report.

Component / Course / Program Level					
Student Outcome	Person or Office Responsible	Assessment Tool or Approach	Standards/Benchmark	Results/Analysis	Action Taken

Instructions: Under student outcomes (Column I) please list the most current student outcomes/competencies to be demonstrated by your graduates. These should be in your assessment plan.
 (Column II) Person/office responsible: If someone specific has been designated to collect the various pieces of evidence, please list their names in this column.
 (Column III) Assessment Tool or Approach: Here you will need to designate the assessment measures you are using to assess the particular outcome. Measures/tools may include term papers, parts of essay tests, internship results; class projects; objective tests; standardized/normed or other licensure tests, or a variety of other measures that may indicate competence in a particular objective.
 (Column IV) Standards/Benchmark: Here you may indicate a particular set of standards you have set for completion or if you are developing benchmarks, please indicate what those are. If you are using a national test, what are the indicators of competence. This also pertains to BOT Initiative #3 which asks us to measure students against some national standard.
 (Column V) Results/Analysis: Indicate what the results were utilizing the assessment tool/measure and applying it against the benchmarks set. Please be fairly specific here, provide relevant data and a brief analysis.
 (Column VI) Action Taken: Indicate any action taken based on the results/analysis you have completed.

PLEASE REMEMBER: Not all objectives have to be measured every semester or every year. All of your objectives should be measured in a 2 to 3 year cycle. Sometimes it depends on when particular courses are offered as to when objectives can be measured. A helpful tool may be implementation of the courses/objective matrix. Some programs have completed this some have not. If you are interested in completing one for your program, please let me know and this office will supply you with the forms and assist in completing this document.