

## **2021-2022**

### **Writing Across the Curriculum Committee Report**

**Co-Chairs:** Doug Eyman (CHSS – 2022), Jacquelyn Brown (SBUS – 2023)

**Committee Members:** Seth Hudson (CVPA – 2023), Daniel Hanley (COS – 2022), Douglas Eyman (CHSS – 2022), Leslie LaCroix (CEHD – 2023), Jacquelyn Brown (SBUS – 2023), K. Raven Russell (CEC – 2023), Suzanne De Janasz (Carter – 2022), Virginia Blair (CHHS – 2022), Trevor Thrall (Schar – 2022)

**Consultants to the Committee:** Carla Burns (CHSS), Lorelei Crerar (COS), Colleen Sweet (CHSS), Sarah Wittman (SBUS), Greg Robinson (CVPA), Peggy Brouse (CEC), Susan Lawrence (Writing Center), Esther Namubiru (Honors College / INTO Mason), Ashley Yuckenburg (SBUS), Ellen Rodgers (CEHD), Michelle LaFrance (CHSS), Jen Stevens (University Libraries), Bethany Usher (Office of Undergraduate Education), Jessie Matthews (Composition), Lisa Lister (Composition), Courtney Wooten (Composition), Anna Habib (Composition), Shelley Reid (Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning)

#### **WAC Program Staff**

Acting Director: Thomas Polk

Graduate Assistant Director: Emily Staudt

#### **Committee Charge**

- Advise and work closely with the Director of Writing Across the Curriculum on current and projected activities and events and to assist departments in the identification and definition of writing-intensive courses in their curricula.
- Articulate and refine the requirements for the WI designated course designated to fulfill the WI requirement in every undergraduate degree across the university with the purpose of establishing homogeneous WI criteria.
- Assist colleges, schools and institutes in the identification of existing or new courses that degree programs propose to meet the WI requirement in their curricula.
- Review regularly the courses WI-syllabi to determine compliance with the WI requirement.
- Suggest ways to meet the WI requirement to faculty teaching the WI designated courses.
- Assist with activities and events related to writing across the curriculum.

#### **2021-2022 Committee Activities**

To date, the Committee has met 5 times during the 2021-2022 academic year; a scheduled sixth meeting is scheduled for the end of April following the submission of this report.

**Policy and guidance: “Implementation of Learning Outcomes and Ongoing Review Writing-Intensive Courses.”** This year, the Committee’s main activity involved developing and approving new WI course review processes as a direct response to the previously approved learning outcomes developed in AY 2020-2021. These processes were approved on April 1, 2022 and are described in the appended “Implementation of Learning Outcomes and Ongoing Review of Writing-Intensive Courses” document. Highlights of these processes include:

- All WI courses are expected to integrate the new WI learning outcomes by Fall 2023;
- The Implementation Review will commence in Fall 2023 and will serve to provide units with feedback on their integration of the WI learning outcomes; this review will be conducted over a two-year period;
- The Recertification Review will commence no sooner than two years after the Implementation Review has concluded and will serve to ensure all units are maintaining alignment with WI criteria and outcomes;
- Committee members are currently developing materials to facilitate these processes, including materials that will help units conduct self-review of their WI courses.

**Liaison with academic units:** During the fall semester, members along with the Acting Director met with local units at the department and college level to discuss the new WI outcomes and the implementation process the Committee was developing; these meetings served to solicit input from units on the implementation process and to engender enhanced communications between the Committee and units about writing in the disciplines and Mason’s core writing curriculum. Members reported on these interactions with units during the Committee’s fall meetings and used the insight gathered to develop the framework for the Implementation and Ongoing Review processes.

**Policy and guidance: WI course enrollments.** In response to a number of local exigencies, the WAC Committee began investigating WI course enrollments and the WI enrollment cap, which is currently set at 35 students per section. The Committee recognizes 1) that many faculty who teach WI courses perceive that cap to be too high (a perception documented in a [report produced by the WAC Program](#)) and 2) that high enrollments impact the quality of instruction faculty can provide. For these reasons, the Committee is collaborating with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning to collect and analyze recent enrollment trends in WI courses; the Committee is also exploring the history of the enrollment cap and the process for changing it. This activity will carry over into next year’s agenda.

As part of this effort, WAC Committee Co-chairs participated in an event on faculty workload in feedback-intensive courses with Provost Mark Ginsberg and VP for Strategic Initiatives and Chief of Staff Ken Walsh sponsored by GMU’s AAUP. Both Mason leaders were receptive to faculty concerns and requested a follow-up meeting with one of our Co-chairs following the discussion. That meeting is set for Monday, April 25th.

**Course approvals:** To date, the Committee approved one new WI course this year. The Committee also reviewed and requested revisions for two additional courses.

- Approved: SOCI 303

- Reviewed and requested revisions: INTS 321 and THR 351

### **WAC Program Activities (Discussed w/ WAC Committee Members)**

**Mason's core writing curriculum:** The Acting Director presented information about Mason's [core writing curriculum](#) during Committee meetings in the fall. This curriculum operates on a "vertical" design which carefully sequences a series of courses designed to facilitate the long-term growth of writers; these courses are ENGH 100/101/121-122, ENGH 302, and the WI course. Analysis of enrollment data revealed that many students do not follow this sequence, so this information was intended to assist members in their liaising with units, with a particular focus on curriculum and advising.

**WAC research initiative: Writing@Mason.** Beginning in 2019, WAC has been collaborating with cross-campus partners, particularly Mason's Composition program, to better understand the broader culture of writing at Mason. During Committee meetings in the fall, the Acting Director described aspects of these research activities, including analysis about enrollments in writing courses. Findings from this project will primarily be used by the Committee for curriculum planning and policy development initiatives.

**Targeted faculty development: New Writing-intensive learning outcomes.** The WAC Program developed a web-based guide and piloted a faculty learning community (FLC) in support of the new learning outcomes and Implementation Review. The FLC and guides have the specific aim of helping faculty and units effectively implement these new outcomes into their WI courses. The Program plans to offer the FLC regularly during the Implementation Review, depending on availability of resources.

**General faculty development initiatives:** The WAC Program has facilitated a number of [faculty development initiatives](#) to engender excellence in writing-enriched teaching and learning across the campus. These initiatives include: a series of workshops on assignment design, student engagement, assessment of learning, and Mason's core writing curriculum; consultations on course design, teaching with writing, preparing WI course applications; and [web-based materials](#) covering a range of topics about writing-enriched teaching and learning

Thomas Polk compiled this report in collaboration with WAC Committee Co-chairs Doug Eyman and Jackie Brown.

## Appendix

### Implementation of Learning Outcomes and Ongoing Recertification Review of Writing-Intensive Courses

Approved by Committee April 1, 2022

In Spring 2021, following its charge to articulate and refine requirements for Writing-intensive (WI) courses, the WAC Committee approved new learning outcomes for WI courses. These outcomes are intended to provide additional clarity on the purpose of the Writing-intensive course and to give additional direction on the kinds of writing instruction that should take place in them.

As the Committee is also charged with regularly reviewing WI courses to certify their alignment with the Writing-intensive requirement, the following document details the review process the Committee will use to 1) ensure that the new outcomes have been effectively implemented across all WI courses and 2) ensure that WI courses are maintaining alignment with the Writing-intensive course criteria and outcomes.

Prior to a review or at any time during a review, academic units may choose to remove the WI designation from their course if they have other courses that better satisfy the requirement. If the department wishes to keep the WI certification, it must go through the review processes outlined below.

#### Implementation Review: Purpose and Schedule

By the first day of the fall 2023 semester, all writing-intensive courses should have the new Writing-intensive learning outcomes fully integrated into their course designs. At this time, the Committee will begin conducting an implementation review with the ultimate goal of helping academic units successfully integrate the new outcomes into their WI courses. Because of the labor involved in designing and reviewing these courses, however, the Committee will use the following 2-year schedule to conduct this review:

Semester	Fall 2023	Spring 2024	Fall 2024	Spring 2025
Colleges	CEHD; CHSS (½)	CHSS (½); CHHS; Carter; Schar	CVPA; CEC	COS; SBUS

The Committee will notify academic units of their upcoming review at the beginning of the semester prior to the review semester. All requested materials (see details below in “Materials to be Collected”) must be submitted to the Committee by the first day of the review semester. For example, if a course is to be reviewed in spring 2024, the academic unit responsible for

administering that course will be notified of this review at the beginning of fall 2023. Additionally, that unit must submit its materials to the Committee by the first day of the spring 2024 semester.

The Committee will share the results of the review with academic units no later than the start of the semester following the review semester. At this time, the Committee will provide feedback on the course and inform academic units about any changes to the course they should make in order to ensure that the course would retain its WI status following subsequent reviews (for more details, see “Ongoing Review”).

**Recertification Review: Purpose and Schedule**

Following the Implementation Review, the Committee will conduct regular Recertification Reviews of WI courses. These reviews serve to ensure that all WI courses are maintaining alignment with the Writing-intensive course criteria and outcomes. This review will begin no sooner than two years following the close of the Implementation Review and will follow the 4-year cycle below:

<b>Semester</b>	Year 1	Year 1	Year 2	Year 2	Year 3 &
	Semester 1	Semester 2	Semester 1	Semester 2	Year 4
<b>Colleges</b>	CEHD; CHSS (½)	CHSS (2/2); CHHS; Carter; Schar	CVPA; CEC	COS; SBUS	No review

The Committee will notify academic units of their upcoming review at the beginning of the semester prior to the review semester. All requested materials (see details below in “Materials to be Collected”) must be submitted to the Committee by the first day of the review semester. For example, if a course is to be reviewed in spring 2024, the academic unit responsible for administering that course will be notified of this review at the beginning of fall 2023. Additionally, that unit must submit its materials to the Committee by the first day of the spring 2024 semester.

The Committee will share the results of the review with academic units no later than the start of the semester following the review semester. At this time, the Committee will also inform academic units about any changes or revisions requested. Academic units will have until the start of the semester following their notification to address any requested revisions and submit them to the Committee for a final review. In the event that revisions submitted by an academic unit are not recertified by the Committee, the WI designation will be removed from the course (said loss of designation will be applied to the semester immediately following notification of re-review).

For example, if a course was reviewed in fall 2023, the academic unit responsible for administering that course will be informed of the results no later than the start of the spring 2024 semester. In the event that the Committee requests revisions, those revisions must be satisfactorily revised by the unit and submitted to the Committee by the start of the fall 2024 semester. The Committee will then review the revisions during the fall 2024 semester and notify the academic unit about the results of that review by the first day of the spring 2025 semester. If the Committee has voted to decertify the course after reviewing the revisions, said loss of designation will be applied to the fall 2025 semester.

## **Review Process**

The Committee, led by the Chair or co-Chairs, and in collaboration with Committee partners (WAC Program, Office of Undergraduate Education, and Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning) will lead the review process, which entails several dimensions.

The following section details the review process, including what materials will be collected, how members will review these materials, how the Committee will vote on course recertification, and how the Committee will accommodate some of the anticipated complexities of the review process.

### ***Materials to be Collected***

In order to conduct an effective review, the Committee needs a comprehensive perspective on how writing is assigned and taught in the courses under review. To that end, the Committee will require academic units to submit the following materials:

- A syllabus with specific targeted writing outcomes identified
- Descriptions/instructions of all major writing assignments (could be included on the syllabus)
- A course schedule with instructional activities
- A narrative contextualizing the course and the writing instruction embedded in it that addresses the following questions:
  - What are the identified learning outcomes? Does the course satisfy at least one outcome from each category?
  - How do the assessments (writing assignments) help faculty to know students have met the outcomes?
  - How does the instruction develop students' ability to meet the outcomes?

The Committee encourages academic units to highlight areas in these materials, particularly in the syllabus and on the schedule, that address the WI learning outcomes.

### ***Reviewers***

Each course will be reviewed by two members of the Committee. It is recommended but not required that one of these reviewers should be the member representing the college in which the reviewed course is taught. Additionally, members should liaise with units in their respective colleges to answer questions about the review and ensure that all required materials are submitted in a timely fashion; units are encouraged to connect with their representatives to share appropriate contact information.

### ***Stages of Review***

- **Preliminary review:** This optional stage offers departments the opportunity to receive some preliminary feedback on their course designs and applications. Committee members and WAC Program staff will be available for scheduled consultations and Q&A sessions.
- **Initial screening:** The initial screening of the review materials ensures that all requested materials have been submitted. If materials are missing or incomplete, the person coordinating the review will correspond with units to request missing information and materials. Once materials are recorded as complete, they will be distributed to reviewers.
- **Committee review:** This stage serves as the official review of the course materials and their alignment with WI criteria and outcomes. Reviewers will record their findings through a survey instrument guided by the implementation review checklist. This stage is further described in the next section “Review of Materials: Committee Review.”
- **Outcomes report:** During this stage, the review coordinator will share with units the outcomes of the review, including feedback from the reviewers.

### ***Review of Materials: Committee Review***

Reviewers will expect to see that the basic course criteria are satisfied and that the course design effectively integrates the targeted outcomes. Reviewers will use the appended implementation review checklist to evaluate each course’s successful integration of the outcomes and alignment with the WI criteria.

Based upon their review of materials, reviewers will confer upon the course one of the following four votes. Reviewers will also record commentary explaining their vote which will be shared with the Committee and the academic unit that administers the course. For the Implementation Review, these categories serve to inform units of their potential status during a future review.

- **Recertify:** This category pertains to courses that retain the WI designation until the next review period.
- **Recertify with request for revisions (administrative review):** This category pertains to courses that only need small revisions (such as adding a syllabus statement) and can be carried out by the Chair, co-Chairs, members charged by the Chair or co-Chairs with this responsibility, or the Director of the WAC Program.

- **Request revisions (Committee review):** This category pertains to courses that need larger revisions (such as adding instruction or better aligning instruction with assignments and outcomes) and needs to be re-evaluated by the Committee.
- **Decertify:** This category pertains to courses that fail to meet the purposes of a WI course as described in the outcomes statement passed by the Committee.

Following the review, courses that receive two of the same votes will be confirmed by the Committee. Courses that receive two different votes will be discussed by the Committee before receiving a final vote.

If the Committee has voted to decertify a course and if the academic unit wishes to keep the WI certification, it must demonstrate that the course has been revised to come back into alignment as described above in the “Ongoing Review: Purpose and Schedule” section. The academic unit is encouraged to request assistance from their college representatives and the WAC Program as they revise the course. In the event that any courses reviewed do not meet the requirements upon re-review, the WI designation will be removed from those courses (said loss of designation will be applied to the semester immediately following notification of re-review).

### ***Course Permutations***

The Committee recognizes that WI courses take many different shapes across the university. The following addresses several of the anticipated permutations.

In the event that a course,

- Has multiple sections that follow the same design, the academic unit will only be expected to submit one master set of review materials;
- Has multiple sections that follow different designs, the academic unit will be expected to submit review materials for each section; in this case, the vote conferred upon the majority of sections will be used as the vote on the overall course’s designation;
- Has split its WI requirement across multiple courses, the academic unit will be expected to submit review materials for each course as a coordinated package.

Academic units that have additional administrative arrangements for their WI courses or do not see their particular administrative arrangements reflected above should contact their college representative, the Chair of the Committee, and the WAC Program.

### ***Non-compliance***

The Committee will consider academic units non-compliant if they do not respond to a review or revision request with all required materials by the date specified in the Committee’s correspondence. If an academic unit is deemed non-compliant, then the course(s) up for review will lose the WI designation (said loss of designation to be applied the semester immediately

following the review semester). Non-compliance and the removal of the WI designation pertains to both the Implementation Review and the Ongoing Review processes.

### **Support for Academic Units**

The WAC Committee encourages academic units to work with the WAC Program and their Committee representative on their course designs. During the pre-review stage, representatives can help academic units learn about the review process and develop their review materials. Following a review that requests revisions, representatives can provide insight on the feedback from the committee and consult with academic units on incorporating that feedback into course revisions.

The WAC Program is also available for consultations and has also developed a set of resources to assist academic units with integrating the new outcomes. These resources include: a set of guides that explains each outcome and offers some practical ways to teach each outcome; a learning community focused on integrating the outcomes into course designs; and stand-alone workshops on teaching with writing. Information about these resources will be made available on the Program's website and linked in review communications.