

## End-of-Program Review Workshop June 2012

### Writing Across the Curriculum 2006-11

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During the five-year span under consideration, between 98 and 100% of faculty report including at least some writing in their programs, while between 94 and 99% report including writing instruction. Because this data set is consistent with the previous five-year review, this summary will zero in on *writing instruction* as a way to unpack this apparent uniformity. In 2006 the reviewers concluded that “students are writing, students are critiquing specific papers, faculty are critiquing specific papers, but there is little evidence that students are *learning* to write, rather than *practicing* writing.” The level of detail in the 2006-2011 data on “modes of instruction,” such as peer review and faculty feedback, has helped to clarify and reinforce some of the initial observations made in 2006.

### Description

#### *Writing instruction*

Faculty self-reporting around writing instruction was consistent across the five-year span.

- 20-30% reported “extensive” instruction
- 37-46% reported “moderate”
- 20-40% reported “a little”
- 1-10% reported “not at all”

In other words, faculty offering less than “extensive” instruction constituted 70-80% of survey respondents.

#### *Modes of instruction*

The data also provide a clear differentiation between what the survey calls “modes of instruction.”

- 80-90% of respondents offered “written guidelines” and “detailed faculty feedback”
- 38-56% offered “pre-writing activities,” “workshops on aspects of the writing process,” “samples of assignments” (a category added in 2009-10), or “peer review”

In other words, the “modes” that we would identify as providing process-oriented instruction were only practiced by about half of the respondents.

#### *Core vs. all programs*

There were also some consistent disparities between Core programs and the all program average in every year since 2007.

- 80-100% of Core programs offered in 2007-2011 provided some kind of writing workshops
- 38-47% of all programs offered workshops

- Core programs also were twice as likely as other programs to incorporate Writing Center tutors.<sup>1</sup>

Caveat: in some areas of writing instruction, Core programs were little better and sometimes worse than the average for all programs: these areas include “pre-writing activities,” “samples or models of assignments,” and “drafts with revision(s).”

## **Preliminary conclusions**

We celebrate the work of all of our colleagues who dive into the teaching of writing, despite the fact that many of them were never trained in writing pedagogy, and we are impressed by how much writing and how much writing instruction is showing up in the data. However, we see at least two narratives emerging in our conversations with students and with faculty colleagues, both of whom continue to express frustration around this subject: 1) there is not enough writing offered as a field of study, at either beginning, intermediate, or advanced levels and 2) students would benefit from more writing instruction, whether within programs and courses or as stand-alone modules such as the very popular course, “Academic Writing as Argument” in Evening and Week-End Studies. What follows are some threads linking those narratives to what we see in the data.

### *Consistency*

While we applaud the strong focus on writing instruction in Core programs, we believe that students need sustained instruction throughout their entire education in order to develop skills appropriate to their growing content knowledge as they progress to more advanced work.

### *Identifying and honing best practices*

We question whether providing “written guidelines” is a mode of instruction; moreover, we are concerned that many faculty have inherited best practices such as “peer review” in name only, never fully learning how to best support students in adopting such practices. Without ongoing faculty development, we have no way of knowing whether or not we are in fact replicating best practices when we invoke concepts such as “peer review” or whether we are further diminishing students’ experience of their own power as “authors.”

### *Combining best practices*

The “modes of instruction” identified in the survey should ideally go hand in hand and will fail to produce significant improvement if offered in isolation from each other. As an institution, we need to identify the best combinations of modes of writing instruction and bring to light the work of faculty who are consistently teaching those combinations. Furthermore, we need to determine the best combinations of practices to yield substantive writing development throughout students’ entire academic careers.

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<sup>1</sup> Since 2008, the Writing Center has moved away from its practice of soliciting faculty to participate in a program tutor model, instead opting for students to self-select their relationship with the Center.

### *Faculty development*

We believe it is time for a reinfusion of best practices into the curriculum through greater support for faculty development (after all, the last writing across the curriculum initiative predates Gen. Ed.). If faculty can implement best practices that move both them and their students beyond written/oral feedback, we believe workloads will decrease and overall outcomes will improve.

### **Suggestions for further analysis**

- Our initial quick read of the raw data suggests that there are no dramatic trends that distinguish the modes of instruction practiced by faculty in one planning unit from those of another planning unit. It would be intriguing, however, to analyze which modes of writing instruction are happening in which planning units and in which combinations.
- We would also like to know more about how much writing is being taught at beginning, intermediate and advanced levels.
- We would like to know more from students and faculty about *why* we write. Beyond testing students' content knowledge, what do we hope to gain from asking them to produce written work and how can we talk to them about how different modes of writing will enhance transferable critical thinking skills?
- The College's iterative Academic Statement Initiative should provide fertile ground to examine writing instruction over the next five years. What kinds of assessment tools could help us track the correlation between that work and ongoing efforts to improve writing instruction?