

Implementing the Writing Intensive Course Requirement

The Faculty Council on Academic Affairs recently announced a new graduation requirement regarding the improvement of student writing skills. Students who enter the university in Fall 2008 will be required to pass a writing intensive course in their major. This requirement is the result of work done by the Faculty Council and two task forces and prompted by faculty concern about student writing skills.

Writing Intensive Q & A

❖ **What are writing intensive (WI) courses?**

WI courses are not simply courses that require a lot of student writing. WI courses include explicit instruction on writing within the discipline, provide ample opportunities for feedback on student writing, and include informal and un-graded assignments. A set of guidelines for WI courses were recommended to and approved by the Faculty Council. See the box on the next page for details.

❖ **If WI courses include writing instruction, won't they have less content?**

Departments are asked to look carefully at any existing courses that are determined to be candidates for WI courses. Accommodating the guidelines for WI courses may require a reduction in some course content.

❖ **Our department has been interested in developing hybrid or online courses. Could we make this a WI course?**

Departments have some flexibility to determine how best to prepare for the WI course requirement. WI courses may be good candidates for a hybrid or fully-online design. Faculty development support will be available to departments that wish to pursue this option.

❖ **Writing intensive sounds work intensive, won't faculty end up buried under piles of student papers?**

The recommended guidelines for WI courses include a recommendation that WI courses have a maximum enrollment of 25 students. The guidelines also encourage the use of informal writing tasks that do not require grading on the part of the instructor. Faculty development support on ways to minimize the paper load will be available to faculty designing and teaching WI courses.

❖ **Our faculty are not trained to teach writing, how will our department be able to prepare for this requirement?**

The coordinator of the writing intensive program will assist departments in reviewing their curricula to help determine how best to prepare for the requirement as well as to provide faculty support in the design and implementation of WI courses, assignments, and activities.

❖ **Do departments have to create brand new courses?**

No. Departments have some flexibility to determine how they would like to prepare for this requirement. An existing course may already meet the WI criteria or need only a few adjustments to do so. Departments may determine for themselves if they wish to create brand new courses.

❖ **What if our department already has WI courses?**

Departments that feel they have existing courses that meet the recommended guidelines to be designated WI should contact Kate Hahn so that they can begin the process to have any potential courses reviewed and prepared for approval.

❖ **How soon does our department need to have writing intensive courses in place?**

The WI course requirement will be in effect for all students who enter NEIU in Fall 2008. Therefore, those programs who graduate a large number of transfer students may find that they need to have a WI course in place relatively quickly (perhaps as early as Fall 2009) in order to accommodate these students.

Recommended Guidelines for Writing Intensive Courses
Approved by the Faculty Council on Academic Affairs, May 2007

1. The writing activities should be an integral part of the course and should be designed so that students will receive active instruction in disciplinary writing. Students will write the equivalent of at least 15 pages of graded assignments.
2. Each writing-intensive course will require multiple types of writing in a course. Writing assignments might include correspondence, memoranda, proposals, progress reports, research reports, work-logs, site descriptions, observations, case studies, lab reports, creative writing, problem-solving, or computer programming, as well as other forms of course-related writing.
3. The graded assignments, consisting of multiple types of writing, will constitute a significant portion (at least 50 percent) of the final grade for the course; the grade on each assignment will reflect effective and correct written expression as well as knowledge of content.
4. On some graded assignments, students will be provided an opportunity to produce multiple drafts, in order to learn that writing is a process as well as a tool for invention and discovery. Students will get feedback from the instructor on those early drafts of written work before the grade is assigned.
5. Each writing-intensive course will also provide an opportunity for students to engage in "ungraded" assignments, such as writing-to-learn activities in order to practice writing and also to become actively engaged in processing the information that is presented in class or in a textbook. Informal journal writing is another useful means of developing students' critical thinking skills.
6. Given that implementing these guidelines will require time and effort, we recommend (a) that sections of Writing-Intensive Courses have an absolute maximum of 25 students so that the instructor can devote a great deal of time to feedback on early drafts of written work and (b) that CU class-size adjustments for Writing-Intensive Courses should be made, following the contractual guidelines specified for ENGL 101.

Departments and programs who believe that they have existing courses that currently meet or approximate the recommended WI guidelines are encouraged to contact Kate Hahn to discuss the next steps.

Anyone with questions about the information provided here should contact Kate Hahn at mk-hahn@neiu.edu or x4490, or call our office assistant, Diane Gritton, at x4467.