**WRITING INTENSIVE COURSES (definition, implementation, and resolution voted 1/23/2013)**

**27 November 2012**

#### Writing-intensive courses in the major provide an opportunity for Bryn Mawr faculty to use their own experience as writers to orient students to the standards, norms, current idioms, genres and modes specific to the discipline. These courses emphasize critical thinking and writing to help students better understand discipline-specific scholarship and to practice its methods, forms, and conventions of expression. The writing assigned in these courses will be integral to the content of the course. It aims to improve students’ ability to represent and build upon material covered in the class and to engage deeply with course content.

**Goals of a Writing Intensive Course:**

1. To give students instruction and practice in writing as a tool of inquiry and critical thinking. Students will further develop their abilities to use writing to create and represent knowledge, to explore and build upon ideas and concepts, and to express thought and perspective.

2. To teach students to produce clear expository writing and/or substantive, convincing arguments by generating critical questions, making claims, developing ideas through reasoning and evidence, and generating a finished product that is appropriate to the writing’s purpose and audience.

3. To orient students to the practices of disciplinary writing. These courses should help students

* to recognize discipline-specific purposes for writing, types of questions posed, and evidence considered persuasive;
* to learn (as appropriate) to carry out discipline-based research;
* to become familiar with the genres, structures, and language of writing characteristic of a discipline.

4. To offer students various process models for writing that they can adapt to their own habits and modes of learning:

* to teach students that good writing rarely is the product of a single draft produced in one sitting; rather that writing occurs in stages over time ;
* to give students practice in typical process stages such as preliminary writing (note-taking, informal writing, outlining, mapping, etc.), drafting, revising, copy-editing;
* to offer strategies for learning to assess the strengths and weaknesses of drafts;
* to teach students to use faculty and peer feedback effectively.

**What is a Writing-Intensive Course?**

1. **Class or Section Size**

Because teaching writing requires faculty to respond to student writing and to confer individually with students, **class size should be limited to 15 students when possible,** with an absolute maximum of 18. Courses with large enrollment, therefore, cannot be designated WI courses (though short writing assignments can be used effectively to teach course content, even in courses with large enrollment).

2. **Writing Courses Required for the Major**

Because students especially benefit from learning discipline-based writing at the points where they enter major study, **it is desirable to position WI courses at the 200-level or 300-level; that is, courses taken primarily by sophomores and juniors are most appropriate for WI designation.**  Since the purpose for the writing-intensive requirement is to prepare students for senior capstone courses, such courses cannot fulfill a department’s WI requirement, even though they usually require a significant amount of writing.

3. **Faculty**

WI courses should be taught by Bryn Mawr’s academic faculty—by senior, junior, CNTT or Writing Program faculty. **Faculty are responsible for teaching writing in the course.** While TA’s or peer tutors may give feedback on writing in its early stages, their consultation should not replace faculty work with student writers. Faculty teaching WI courses should expect to respond to drafts and revisions, to confer individually with students, and so forth. TA’s or peers who tutor writing in a WI course must be trained by the Writing Center in writing pedagogy and conferencing techniques; and they should meet regularly with the faculty instructor to discuss writing assignments, goals, and strategies.

4. **Amount of writing**

A **substantial amount of writing** should be assigned in WI courses, distributed over **several assignments of varying lengths.** Instructors should plan to assign **a minimum of thirty pages,** including drafts and revisions. Departments that believe a lower minimum is appropriate for their discipline may petition to reduce the page requirement by providing a rationale for doing so.

Types of assignments vary among the disciplines, and faculty are encouraged to design assignments that complement work within the discipline. Writing might include, for example, argumentative essays; critical reviews of the scientific literature or policy; reports of laboratory work; mathematical assignments that include a significant analytic or discussion component; assignments that include a multimedia component; or critiques of objects, events, performances, or research papers.

5. **Writing Instruction**

a. Syllabi should identify the course as writing-intensive and provide a rationale for the designation by listing the writing goals of the course.

b. Whenever possible, **writing should be integrated with course content**.

c. Class discussion should include conversation about and instruction on the writing process; on the elements of disciplinary writing; and on the ways writing in one discipline differs from writing in others.

d. **Students in WI courses should be given the opportunity to practice preliminary writing and drafting, and should be taught how to revise on the basis of faculty feedback.** While not every assignment must require students to practice the entire writing process (preliminary writing; drafting; revision; copy-editing), most assignments should reflect some aspect of this process.

e. Faculty should give thought to the **sequence of assignments and revisions** so that they build on one another.

f. Faculty are expected to **confer individually with students at least twice during the semester**, and to provide **written feedback on work in progress**. Other feedback techniques may also be incorporated into the course, for example, in-class peer review or support from the Writing Center.

**6. Writing-Attentive Courses**

Normally, students should fulfill the writing requirement in the major by taking a single WI course. When a department petitions Curriculum Committee to have students fulfill the major requirement by completing two “writing-attentive” courses, these two courses, between them, should fulfill the requirements for a WI course. These writing attentive courses should enroll no more than 22 students.

**Implementing the WI Requirement  
Dec. 1, 2012**

**Timing:**

If we adopt a WI requirement by March of this academic year (2012-2013), this requirement would apply for the first time to the Class of 2017. Thus, the real demand for WI courses would start in the sophomore year of the Class of 2017, that is, 2014-15.  
  
Since the requirement is designed to address writing development beyond the ESem and before the senior capstone, students would not be able to complete it until after their first semester. In most cases, the students would complete the requirement during the sophomore and junior year. Students on the Curriculum Committee suggested that the earlier these courses could take place, the better. While positioning these courses early in the major is not always feasible, the students felt that they would have greatly benefitted from a discipline-based writing-intensive course early on in their pursuit of the major.

**Putting Writing Intensive Courses in Place**

By November 15, 2013, each department will need to submit a plan to Curriculum Committee describing how students would meet the writing intensive requirement in that particular major. Departments will designate existing courses as Writing Intensive courses, or create new ones, and provide draft syllabi for these courses. These courses should adhere to the guidelines for Writing Intensive (WI) courses (see document entitled, “Writing Intensive Courses”). **Departments** **can designate more than one course as a WI course.** While the preference of the Curriculum Committee is to have students fulfill the requirement by taking a single WI course, a department can petition Curriculum Committee to have students fulfill the major requirement by completing two “*writing attentive*” courses. These two courses together should (between the two experiences) fulfill the guidelines for a WI course. These writing attentive courses should enroll no more than 22 students.

For students with particular interests, or for those students choosing more interdisciplinary pathways through the major, departments may allow those students to fulfill their WI course requirement in departments or programs outside the major, or with a course offered through the Writing Program. Departments willing to allow this flexibility to individual students should indicate their willingness to do so in their proposal to Curriculum Committee.

**Resources**

Adopting the WI requirement means that departments will need to make the teaching of writing a priority. In AY 2011-2012, departments offered an average of eight 200- and 300-level courses with an enrollment of 17 or fewer students (Range = 5 to 14 courses; NOT including independent studies; senior theses, senior seminars or Praxis III courses). A very rough way to look at resources is to assume that departments will adapt one of these lower enrollment courses to make it writing intensive, or substitute one of these courses with a WI course. Using that analysis, all departments should be able to adopt this requirement in a relatively resource neutral way in terms of the number of courses offered. Obviously, this will not work in all cases, but departments do appear to have several courses with which to work.

We understand that we cannot rely on the fact that all faculty know how to teach writing. We will provide professional development opportunities and ongoing support for any interested faculty members.

**Assessment**

Given that we have identified the ability to write well as an important learning goal for all of our students and we are creating a requirement that all students complete a writing intensive course, we need to assess the success of this requirement in meeting our goals. We will use our existing assessment mechanisms for this purpose.

First, we can use the relevant new quantitative items from the existing course evaluation form to assess students’ attitudes about how well the WI courses have improved their writing. However, this assessment mechanism is an indirect measure. We also need to provide some form of direct assessment. Therefore in AY 2013-2014, we will make the focus of departmental assessment student writing at the end of the junior year. Sometime in the spring of 2014, departments will use a rubric or some other direct assessment tool to evaluate the writing of their junior majors. This will give us a baseline for how well we train students to write currently. In Spring 2016, we will again measure the writing of juniors within the major. These junior majors will be the first group to have taken a WI course as part of their major. By situating the assessment at the departmental level, each department can choose the assessment tool that fits their disciplinary goals for student writing.

Several departments already have good rubrics for evaluating students’ writing. Several other tools have been developed by TriCo faculty through the Teagle grant and are available for adoption or adaptation. Many professional organizations also have good writing assessment tools available. The Office of Institutional Research and the Provost’s Office will provide support to departments in developing and using a writing assessment. In AY 2013-2014 and AY 2015-2016, writing assessment will be the focus for the normal departmental assessment process. No other departmental assessment plans will be needed in those years (although departments are welcome to do other forms of assessment if they choose).

**Resolution to Incorporate a Writing Intensive Course Requirement into the Major (2nd vote Jan. 23, 2013)**

From Curricular Rules of the Faculty Dec 2010-- http://www.brynmawr.edu/cc/

II. Curriculum

B. Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

4. Major Subjects

b. Minimum course requirements (page 10)

**Current Rule**

b. Minimum Course Requirements

The minimum course requirement in the major subject shall be eight course units, consisting of full year or semester courses of which at least two courses must be 200-level work and at least two courses must be at the 300-level or above. For interdepartmental majors, at least two courses must be at the 300-level or above. The course requirements in the major subject usually consist of the following:

* + - two course units of first-year (100-level) work;
    - two to four course units of second-year (200 level) work;
    - and two to four course units of advanced (300-and 400-level) work.

A major should require no more than fifteen courses, including prerequisites and allies from other departments. Except where explicitly forbidden, courses used to fulfill major requirements may also satisfy other course requirements, including divisional requirements.

**Proposed Rule Change (~~deletions~~ and additions noted)**

b. Minimum Course Requirements

The minimum course requirement in the major subject shall be eight course units, ~~consisting of full year or semester courses~~ of which at least one course must be writing intensive (or the equivalent attention to writing in two courses) at the 200 or 300 level, at least two courses must be 200-level work and at least two courses must be at the 300-level or above. For interdepartmental majors, at least two courses must be at the 300-level or above.

The course requirements in the major subject usually consist of the following:

* two course units of first-year (100-level) work;
  + - two to four course units of second-year (200 level) work;
    - one course unit of writing intensive work designed to be taken during the sophomore or junior year (200-300 level);
    - and two to four course units of advanced (300-and 400-level) work.

A major should require no more than fifteen courses, including prerequisites and allies from other departments. Except where explicitly forbidden, courses used to fulfill major requirements may also satisfy other course requirements, including divisional requirements.

Courses that satisfy the writing requirement are identified by the sponsoring department or program, subject to review by the Committee on the Undergraduate Curriculum. Criteria and goals for Writing Intensive courses may be found on the Curriculum Committee’s web site.