

Recommendation Report
on
Writing Across the Curriculum

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Writing Across the Curriculum Steering Committee
University of Nevada Las Vegas



WAC Steering Committee

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Steering Committee. The WAC Steering Committee was formed in spring 2006 by the former Director of General Education, Beth Rosenberg, with the support of the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, Michael Bowers, to further explore the General Education Task Force's 2003 recommendation that UNLV start a WAC program.

Section 2 of this report provides a narrative of the Committee's activities. The WAC Steering Committee met for over a year, reviewed existing scholarship on WAC programs, examined model programs, sponsored an all-day planning retreat, and collected information about the state of undergraduate writing at UNLV. Records of the committee's activities can be found at its website at <http://writinglinks.unlv.edu/wac>.

Section 3 presents a review of scholarship on WAC. "Writing across the curriculum" (also called "writing in the disciplines" or "communication across the curriculum") refers to an educational reform movement aimed at addressing the shortcomings of the freshman composition-only model of writing instruction in higher education. WAC started in the late 1970s and spread to as many as half of all colleges and universities by the late 1980s. WAC assumes that writing is a complex, social activity that can not be learned early on or with one or two "skill" courses at the freshman level. To write well requires repeated opportunities for practice and feedback, particularly when learning discipline-specific genres that can not be taught in freshman composition and that faculty in the majors are best suited to teach.

WAC programs primarily aim to improve student writing by providing information and support to instructors in all departments so that they may assign writing more regularly and more effectively. Teaching techniques associated with WAC have been shown to improve student learning as well as student and teacher satisfaction. The resources that support such instruction, including providing faculty development stipends and holding class sizes to suitable levels (~20:1 student-to-instructor ratio), require institutions to make a significant financial commitment to writing instruction. The institutions that do are increasingly being recognized for their efforts, as writing skills are considered more important than ever due to the global information economy, e-mail, and the Internet.

Section 4 of the report details the Committee's inquiry into undergraduate writing at UNLV, including its review of assessment reports from the Freshman Composition Program, all undergraduate majors, and Career Services. The committee also reviewed results from standardized test scores such as the CAAP, GMAT, GRE, and NSSE. We also surveyed faculty/staff and department chairs. We found that according to the standardized test scores, UNLV students are generally writing at par as students from other institutions, though there might be a slight drop off at the senior year. According to department assessment reports, students are generally meeting department expectations regarding communication outcomes. However, undergraduate writing skills still do not meet faculty and employer expectations.

Freshman composition assessments can not measure writing development between the freshman and senior years and can not show us how well students are at writing in the major. Few departments are directly assessing their majors' writing skills (most use indirect methods such as student surveys and course grades). While the survey response rates were low, those department chairs and faculty/staff who responded to our surveys largely supported more writing requirements in general education and in the major. The faculty/staff also expressed a desire for more information and support when dealing with common issues related to assigning writing, such as mechanics, plagiarism, citing sources, English as a Second Language (ESL) writers, and computer tools. The faculty/staff also expressed concerns that pressures to increase class sizes and to publish research were affecting their ability to assign writing.

Section 5 of the report presents the Committee's recommendations based the results of our research and discussion:

- **Recommendation 1: Create a WAC Program with a Mission and Objectives that Go Beyond the Goals of Freshman Composition.** Our first recommendation affirms our support for WAC and articulates the goals of such a program. The WAC program should primarily provide the support and resources necessary to enhance writing instruction beyond the first year and in the majors.
- **Recommendation 2: Seek Approval of a One Course Writing Intensive (WI) Requirement.** All majors should be required to take one upper-division course in their major designated as "Writing Intensive" (WI). Such courses should meet minimum standards that are general enough to allow individual instructor autonomy but that also ensure effectiveness, rigor, and consistency across all departments. Class enrollment sizes should be capped at a level conducive to writing instruction, preferably 20:1 (TAs can be used to maintain the ratio in larger classes, though this is not preferred.) Instructors should receive stipends to attend faculty development workshops and course development stipends to adapt their courses to meet WI guidelines. Any WI requirement wouldn't realistically be able to be made a graduation requirement until the 2012-2014 catalog.
- **Recommendation 3: Establish a Center or Institute that has Resources to Assist Individual Faculty and Department Efforts to Incorporate Writing-Based Pedagogies.** A center or institute should be created that has adequate resources to assist and motivate faculty and departments to integrate more writing. Such a center would require an annual budget of approximately \$450,000 to implement a WI requirement as proposed. The money would primarily fund faculty workshops and course development stipends. Instructors should receive additional support in the form of "writing fellows," student tutors specifically assigned to WI course instructors. The center will need a director and staff.

Many institutions with nationally recognized WAC programs use such a center or institute as an administrative home. A center or institute presents a more concrete "naming" opportunity for donors and can further be used to demonstrate the University's commitment to writing instruction. Communication-related community outreach and

research can also be sponsored through such a center. Some resources can be conserved by sharing the Writing Center or Teaching and Learning Center's facilities.

Some institutions have recently received multi-million dollar gifts to enhance writing instruction through such centers. UNLV should seek similar external funds.

- **Recommendation 4: Refine the General Education Learning Outcomes to Reflect a Broadened Conception of Writing Ability.** The current outcome for the General Education Core is derivative of the freshman composition-only model of writing instruction. Refining the core to include WAC-oriented criteria would not only send a message to students and the community that writing is more sophisticated and takes more practice than 6 credits, but it would make the institution and individual departments more accountable for integrating communication skills into the whole curriculum.
- **Recommendation 5: Move the Writing Center into the WAC Program.** A WAC program would increase demand for the Writing Center, which is currently housed in the College of Liberal Arts but ambiguously serving the entire university with an uneven budget and GA staffing (though there are plans to increase its budget through fees attached to ENG 101). To clarify its role and ensure more consistent funding, the Writing Center should be aligned with the WAC program.
- **Recommendation 6: Further Explore a Writing Proficiency Requirement.** Assuming that freshman composition at best can achieve only a general level of academic literacy, many institutions adopt a "graduation" or "junior-rising" writing proficiency requirement. Such requirements can be used to effectively evaluate transfer students and more accurately measure writing development in college. The Committee, however, did not have time to fully explore this issue and recommends further study.

Faculty and employers universally agree that strong writing skills are important. Most students, however, are not given enough opportunities to practice writing under conditions optimal for the development of writing ability, which include class sizes small enough to receive one-to-one feedback and the opportunity to revise one's writing after receiving constructive feedback on all aspects of the writing, among other factors. Also, instructors often shy away from assigning writing because they don't know how to handle the seeming range of writing abilities, including ESL and basic writers. Instructors worry about policing plagiarism, and they fear that grading papers will take too much time away from their research.

A writing across the curriculum program seeks to ensure that faculty, and students, receive the resources they need to improve undergraduate writing ability. However, this support does not come without a price, nor is there an easy "one time" fix to the "writing problem." Adopting a WI requirement requires that faculty and administration are willing to invest considerable long-term resources into developing students' general and discipline-specific writing abilities.

The payoff will be that the University can make inroads into the sometimes fair, sometimes off-base perception that students can't write and start contributing to the perception that graduates of UNLV distinguish themselves as literate participants in their professions and society.

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1. Introduction

The following report presents the findings and recommendations of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Steering Committee. The Committee was formed in spring 2006 by Beth Rosenberg, former Director of General Education, following the 2003 recommendations of the General Education Task Force, which suggested a writing across the curriculum program as part of the changes to the Core.

The WAC Steering Committee's aims were thus to

- Conduct a review of undergraduate writing on campus
- Study the feasibility of the Gen Ed Task Force's recommendations
- Develop a mission statement and set of objectives for a WAC program
- Articulate a plan for implementing writing across the curriculum

The committee met throughout 2006-2007 year and engaged in many activities, including reviewing published scholarship on WAC theory and practice, studying model WAC programs, collecting information about the state of undergraduate writing at UNLV, and hosting an all-day planning retreat on October 6, 2006.

This report is divided into four main parts. Section 2 provides a narrative that summarizes WAC Steering Committee's charge and activities leading up to this report. The following part, Section 3, reviews literature on writing across the curriculum scholarship. This review articulates many of the guiding assumptions on WAC theory and practice that the Committee followed during its deliberations. Section 4 presents the results of the Committee's investigation into the state of undergraduate writing at UNLV. Section 5 details the Committee's recommendations.

The Committee supports the development of a WAC program at UNLV. However, the Committee also wishes to emphasize that there is no easy fix to the "writing problem." Faculty must be willing to accept additional responsibility for assigning writing and developing writing ability, particularly in the majors. At the same time, the administration must be willing to support teachers' efforts to integrate more writing, including providing incentives and rewards in the form of faculty development stipends, smaller classes, and additional tutoring resources for students.

Writing across the curriculum fundamentally seeks to change the way writing instruction is delivered on campus. It aims to create a "culture of writing," whereby students learn that writing is a complex ability that requires constant practice, reflection, and discipline. Teachers too must change their thinking about writing. The faculty must come to understand that writing is integral to the activities of the professions and disciplines, and that writing is a key way that novices are initiated into these knowledge-intensive fields of activity. Teachers must therefore "demystify" for their students how writing functions in specific fields to create and share new knowledge, to

solve problems, and to otherwise mediate the daily activities of the community (see Bazerman, 2000).

The freshman composition sequence can only serve as an introduction to this complexity and cannot really delve into the distinct language practices of each discipline. This is the aim of WAC, to help faculty across the university integrate writing into their courses in such a fashion that students come to understand how the conventions of language use vary from discipline to discipline, and how “good writing” means something slightly different to the scientist, engineer, historian, psychologist, etc. A WAC program promotes the conversation, if you will, about the complexity and variability of language use in our society. An effective WAC program gets everyone, students and faculty alike, talking about “good writing,” what it is and how one achieves it. It is through this extended conversation, and more focused attention paid to the importance of writing, that students will come to develop more fully as effective communicators, generally and within their more specialized fields of practice.

2. Narrative of the Committee

In 2000, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NCCU) recommended changes to the general education core and “suggested” a writing across the curriculum (WAC) program:

“The College [of Liberal Arts] should look seriously at the provision of writing instruction with the objective of forming a writing across the curriculum program as supported by faculty most closely associated with writing instruction.” (p. 64)

In 2003-2004, the President Carol Harter appointed the General Education Task Force, with Chris Hudgins (current Interim Dean, College of Liberal Arts, former Chair, Department of English) as chair.

The General Education Task Forces revised the Core Curriculum and recommended a writing across the curriculum program based on the assumptions that WAC would

1. Provide students with intensive practice in writing in their fields, beyond the writing required in freshman composition, particularly in majors that do not require much writing
2. Produce student writing that facilitates assessment of a host of student learning outcomes
3. Be a vehicle for portfolio assessment
4. Create a number of seminar-sized courses conducive to engaged learning between faculty and students

In 2004, Beth Rosenberg was appointed Director of General Education. In 2005, Rosenberg initiated a pilot “Writing Links” program, funded by an internal Planning Initiative Grant, as a simultaneous effort to improve general education teaching and integrate more writing in general education courses.

Beth Rosenberg also created the Writing Across the Curriculum Steering Committee in spring 2006 with the charge of studying WAC programs nationally and writing a recommendation report for implementing WAC. Jeffrey Jablonski, an Associate Professor in the Department of English, who also has research specializations in rhetoric and composition and writing across the curriculum, was appointed as Assistant Director of General Education and Chair of the WAC Steering Committee.

The WAC steering committee met twice in spring 2006 to discuss the feasibility of adopting a writing intensive (WI) requirement, another recommendation of the Gen Ed Task Force. Initial questions about what constitutes a writing intensive course were discussed, along with concerns about the expansion of small-sized writing courses in light of the University’s push toward large-sized lecture courses (see Part 3 for a definition of writing intensive courses).

The committee reviewed basic background literature on WAC. The committee also discussed the national trend of “communication across the curriculum” (CAC) as the direction many universities were going when starting (or reviving an existing) writing initiative. CAC programs broaden the scope to focus on multiple forms of communication, written, spoken, visual, and digital. The committee was split on whether or not such an approach would de-emphasize writing, which was deemed the charge of the committee and the most lacking student skill (see Part 3 for more explanation of communication across the curriculum).

The committee also decided it would need to have an extended discussion on the topic, so a retreat was planned for fall 2006. The purpose of the retreat was to:

1. Gather more input on plans for implementing WAC at UNLV
2. Develop ideas for WAC objectives and mission statement
3. Work toward a consensus on the best model for implementing a WAC program

Minutes and PowerPoint slides from the retreat are available at the WAC Steering Committee’s website (<http://writinglinks.unlv.edu/wac>). The general sentiments that resulted from the day’s discussion were as follows:

1. **Emphasize WAC over CAC:** Most of the participants agreed that while “communication across the curriculum” was a worthwhile goal, the institution should focus on writing. Other initiatives could follow or be folded into an existing WAC program.
2. **Implement a minimal WI requirement:** Most of the participants were not ready to commit the institution to a WI requirement as ambitious as schools such as University of Hawaii or University of Minnesota, which have WI requirements of 5 and 4 courses respectively. Most of the participants wanted to adopt a modest requirement of 1 or 2 courses and then revisit the issue of expanding the requirement after a period of assessment.
3. **Phase in any requirements:** Most of the participants believed that any WI requirement could be expanded, but that it should be evaluated and, depending on assessment results, gradually expanded at a rate that does not unduly burden departments or create resistance among faculty and students.

The committee also spent the summer, fall, and spring semesters of 2006-2007 collecting data about what it referred to as the “state of undergraduate writing at UNLV.” The committee attempted to find out if indeed UNLV undergraduate writing was deficient and gauge the true need for a writing across the curriculum program. The results of this inquiry are compiled in Section 4 of this report.

After examining data such as assessment reports from the Freshman Composition program, assessment reports from all undergraduate degree programs, standardized graduate program entrance exam scores such as GMAT and GRE, and surveys of employers, faculty, and staff, the

committee determined that there is inconclusive evidence that UNLV undergraduate writing is in some way deficient but that there is room for improvement in undergraduate writing instruction. Two of the key findings from this inquiry were that (1) instructors desire more information on how to address many of the common problems associated with assigning writing in college, and (2) departments could do more to accurately and directly assess student communication skills. A WAC program would allocate resources to help inform instructors and improve instruction, as well as assist departments in their efforts to develop and, perhaps more importantly, assess the ir majors' discipline- and field-specific communication skills.

The spring 2007 semester was spent further discussing particulars of a WI requirement. As the committee further researched models at other institutions and discussed language for a WI requirement at UNLV, it realized the complexities and dilemmas of implementing a WI requirement. Namely, a WI requirement places an additional curricular demand on departments that requires each department to surrender some of its autonomy to an extra-departmental committee that ensures the rigor and consistency of all courses across the university designated as WI. The oversight of WI requirement is typically placed in such an extra-departmental committee, which may or may not be tied to the regular oversight duties of the faculty senate, depending on the institution. Moreover, adopting a WI requirement requires a long-term commitment of resources to faculty development and student support. Departments must also be willing to support WI instruction by allowing smaller class sizes and rewarding the increased use of writing in the classroom (which is more labor intensive than the traditional lecture mode of instruction) in merit and promotion.

While the committee is in favor of writing across the curriculum, it is wary of recommending a universal WI requirement if the faculty, the departments, and the central administration as a whole are not willing to make a long term commitment to such a program. It is clear that faculty and employers believe that strong communication skills are extremely important. The question is whether or not this institution is willing to place writing instruction among its financial priorities at this time.

The WAC Steering Committee supports a WI requirement in principle, but it also supports department autonomy. Institutions that have WI requirements balance institution-wide standards with department autonomy by devising standards that are flexible enough for individual faculty and departments.

The Committee invites readers to visit its website at <http://writinglinks.unlv.edu/wac> for a complete record of committee meetings as well as for links to additional information, including model programs and other WAC-related websites.

3. Literature Review: WAC in National Context

This section presents an overview of writing across the curriculum theory and practice. As the following review will demonstrate, WAC is fundamentally a faculty development program aimed at improving student writing through changing the way writing is used in classrooms. Any institution that desires to start a WAC program should be aware of the true commitment to faculty development and student support that a WAC program entails. For a WAC initiative to succeed, a preponderance of faculty must be willing to change how they teach, and administration must be willing to support these teachers' efforts. Students will also require additional resources to support their efforts to meet higher expectations for literacy. There is no easy fix to the "writing problem," especially without faculty involvement and administrative support.

Structural Problems with Higher Education Writing Instruction

In his detailed history of writing instruction in higher education, David Russell (2002) identifies three problems with writing instruction in higher education:

1. The elective curriculum, departmental organization, and emphasis on research gradually eroded the entire faculty's shared responsibility for assigning and assessing writing and speaking.
2. Between 1900 and 1975, the focus on writing instruction in higher education shifted predominantly to how writing was being taught in freshman composition rather than on the shortcomings of a three- to six-credit writing requirement at the freshman level.
3. Reform movements designed to address "literacy crises" resulting from the structural shortcomings of writing instruction in higher education have faced problems overcoming the compartmentalization of academic administration and resources.

Russell found that before the first freshman composition requirement was instituted at Harvard in 1885, writing and speaking assignments were more commonly thought the purview of all faculty. Prior to the 1890s, all Harvard students would have to pass "rhetoricals," written and oral exams reviewed by faculty committees. This practice slowly changed as faculty became more specialized and the responsibility over graduation requirements turned inward to individual departments. The goal of students proving their writing and speaking skills was subordinated to students completing a concentration of courses in a technical area.

Complaints about student writing were thus gradually directed solely at English departments and the freshman writing requirement. Debates about how to improve student writing skills became narrowly focused on how freshman composition should be taught, rather than on the limitations of freshman composition as the only mode of writing instruction. Some degree programs, such as engineering, added upper-division "technical writing" courses (circa 1950s) to address employer

complaints about student writing skills, but these courses were generally taught by English faculty and did little to remedy disciplinary faculty's lack of interest in teaching communication as integral to a discipline or profession's activity.

As time passed and higher education compartmentalization became more entrenched, efforts to address the structural problem of too little writing instruction faced the difficulty of sustaining inter-departmental initiatives amidst the inertia of department politics. Russell describes one such failed reform movement, the Communications Movement of the 1940s and 1950s. Combined speech and writing classes of this time attempted to overcome the perceived artificial separation of speaking and writing instruction, reinforced by separate English and Communication departments. This movement gradually failed to take hold as a permanent method of instruction, mostly because of the inherent disciplinary separation.

Russell notes, however, that the writing across the curriculum movement, started in the 1970s, has managed to be the most enduring reform effort aimed at returning more responsibility for students' writing skills to faculty outside English departments. Russell points to curricular requirements such as the "writing intensive" course as one factor contributing to the longevity of WAC programs. Other factors include the knowledge imparted to faculty via research into composing practices and writing in the disciplines from the field of rhetoric and composition, and the resourcefulness of WAC programs in terms of its partnering with other initiatives such as teaching and learning, computer literacy, and assessment.

Russell's historical study demonstrates several key points that institutions considering adopting writing across the curriculum should consider:

1. The compartmentalization and subsequent reduction of writing instruction to freshman English and an occasional upper-division English course proved insufficient to adequately prepare literate citizens and professionals.
2. Writing instruction should be the responsibility of faculty in all departments, not limited to faculty in English departments.
3. Writing across the curriculum has been successful because it returns responsibility to all faculty, incorporates faculty development, and is based on research.

However, Russell cautions that any initiative designed to overcome the compartmentalization of writing instruction faces tough challenges, including financial constraints, resistance to coordination, and staffing turnover. While WAC has seemed to endure the longest, most of these reform initiatives experienced only short-term success, or failed altogether. Institutions considering WAC should not assume it to be an easy, or cost-free, solution.

Edward White (1990), a specialist in writing assessment, echoes Russell's points when he writes,

...[Despite] apparently overwhelming support, the roots of WAC remain shallow at most institutions. Usually set up outside the required curriculum, the program is peripheral to the academic departments and hence vulnerable to budget cuts and to administrators'

shifting interests. The two crucial support services for WAC, an ongoing faculty-development program (so that the economist and the biologist can learn about assigning and responding to various kinds of student writing) and a writing center for tutorial work at all levels, are particularly exposed and are often the first to feel the budget ax. If the WAC program is based on specific courses in the departments—sometimes called “W” or “WI” (writing-intensive) courses—two abuses are likely to develop: increasing class size, which makes much writing impossible, and decreasing emphasis on writing, as original faculty members who understand WAC rotate out of the courses and newly hired department specialists rotate in. ... **WAC programs set adrift in the curriculum, without careful monitoring and support, can be ineffective or worse.** (p. 29; emphasis added)

Common Features of WAC Programs

Writing across the curriculum programs began in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a response to the perceived lack of literacy of first-generation college students at that time (Fulwiler, 1991; Thaiss, 1998). Small colleges such as Beaver College, PA, and Central College, IA, and some large universities, namely Michigan Technological University, first began by introducing faculty outside English departments to new pedagogical techniques for assigning writing and its related research on composing processes that were emerging from the field of rhetoric and composition, a modern subfield of English studies. Some institutions supplemented faculty development by adding new writing requirements, including writing intensive courses. One survey mailed to all 2,735 four-year and two-year colleges estimated that by the late 1980s nearly 40% of higher education institutions claimed some type of WAC program (McLeod & Shirley, 1987).

In a survey of 139 programs, Griffin (1985) identified faculty workshops, curricular changes, and writing centers and tutors/fellows as the common features of WAC programs circa the mid-1980s:

1. **Faculty workshops** : Because improvement in writing ability as a result of a particular program is difficult to measure, most WAC programs aim to change university curricula and faculty pedagogy, which has been shown to have an impact on student writing (McLeod, 1995). Faculty development is thus a critical component to the success of any WAC program. The earliest workshops focused on what came to be known as “writing-to-learn” activities: short, impromptu or otherwise informal writing tasks that help students think through key concepts or ideas presented in a course (see Jablonski and Nagelhout, 2004). Such “informal” writing can lead to better formal, or graded, writing because it helps students understand the material and gives the instructor an opportunity to provide feedback in the formative stages of a writing assignment. Research has shown mechanical errors increase with the cognitive difficulty of a writing task (Bean, 1993, p. 64). The more students understand the material, the fewer errors appear in their formal writing. Thus, informal writing is a key way to improve student writing. Most WAC programs provide incentives and rewards for faculty workshop participation in the form of stipends and course development grants. UNLV’s Teaching and Learning Center

already offers some WAC-oriented workshops without stipends (see Section 4).

- 2. Curricular changes:** To ensure that students receive more direct writing instruction in college, many institutions in the 1980s adopted new curricular requirements. Some schools created “writing links” that paired a 1-3 credit English department writing course with a course from another department. The idea was that students would receive additional practice in writing, while writing on topics from content courses of their choosing. While not technically a faculty-centered WAC course, where the faculty member from the content course is directly involved in writing instruction, writing links have many variations including some where instructors work closely to coordinate assignments. (UNLV has been experimenting with writing links since 2004, see <http://writinglinks.unlv.edu>.)

The other, more popular curricular change was the writing intensive, or “WI,” course. A writing intensive course is taught by a faculty member in the discipline and marked by standards that must be met by all WI-designated courses, such as requiring a minimum amount of writing (e.g., 5,000 words, 20 pages, 5 papers), direct instruction in writing (e.g., clear assignment guidelines, feedback on drafts, conferences, class discussion of samples), some informal writing, at least one assignment that can be revised, and the writing assignments making up a significant portion of the final grade. Most schools with WAC programs require 2 WI courses, including at least one upper-division course in the major. Some schools require more (e.g., 5 at the University of Hawaii; 4 at the University of Minnesota).

At some schools, earning a certain grade in a WI course satisfies a graduation writing requirement (this is common for California State system schools). Because instructors need time to read and respond to writing assignments, student-to-instructor ratios are typically capped at 18 to 20 students. Teaching assistants can be used in larger classes and discussion sections to keep a similar ratio, though it is preferred to have a faculty member engaged in the direct writing instruction. As previously mentioned, White (1990) cautions against adopting WI requirements without the willingness to commit long term resources to faculty development and administration of the program, otherwise they become another sham requirement existing only “on the books.”

- 3. Writing centers and tutors/fellows:** Most WAC programs use writing centers to support the students enrolling in WI courses by giving students a place to receive additional, one-to-one instruction and feedback. Writing centers are not “editing shops” that “clean up” bad writing, but places where trained tutors serve as general readers who help student-writers meet the guidelines of particular writing assignments. Writing “fellows” are typically undergraduate or graduate student tutors who are assigned as assistants to individual instructors teaching writing intensive courses. Writing fellows do not grade papers for the instructor, but rather assist the instructor by reading drafts, reviewing assignments, meeting with students, etc. Such “curriculum-based peer tutors” (Soven, 1993) also become a key way to support individual instructors as they work to integrate more writing into a course. UNLV has a Writing Center, but it would need more resources to support a full-fledged WAC program (see Part 4).

Guiding Assumptions

Griffin (1985) also identified the “shared premises” supporting the 139 WAC programs in his survey:

1. **Writing skills must be practiced and reinforced throughout the curriculum, otherwise they atrophy, no matter how well they were taught in the beginning**
2. **Since written discourse is central to a university education, the responsibility for the quality of student writing is university-wide**
3. **Writing is a powerful tool for learning**

The first point seems commonsensical. It is perhaps the main reason why students have difficulty writing. They often do not get enough practice, particularly science, engineering, and social science majors. However, simply assigning more writing does not automatically lead to improvements in writing, particularly in terms of discipline-specific writing. Without direct instruction from disciplinary experts in appropriate ways to communicate like an expert in a field (e.g., use of argument strategies, use of evidence, style/language choice, and format) only the brightest students acquire the discipline-specific writing abilities that professors take for granted. This point reinforces Griffin’s second notion. All faculty, particularly faculty teaching undergraduate majors, have the responsibility for teaching students how to communicate like a scientist, engineer, architect, psychologist, historian, etc.

Griffin’s third assumption, that writing is a powerful mode of learning, often requires more explanation. Many people reduce “good writing” to the mastery of surface features of grammar and mechanics. However, studies of how students learn and how professionals compose show that writing serves important epistemic, or knowledge-building, functions (Britton et al., 1977; Emig, 1971). Incorporating more writing in the classroom has many benefits:

1. **Promotes active learning:** Instead of passively listening to a lecture, students can be writing responses to short prompts, summarizing a reading, articulating questions they have about the material, etc.
2. **Promotes participation and discussion:** Everyone should have something to say if asked to write on a topic for five minutes before class discussion.
3. **Reveals what students are thinking and learning:** Informal writing provides feedback to the teacher about what students do and do not understand.
4. **Helps students internalize new ideas:** Students use their own language to synthesize and assimilate course content.

5. **Creates student/teacher and teacher/student dialogue**: The instructor can comment on students' informal writing, creating further engagement.
6. **Allows students to reflect metacognitively and personally about learning**: Students can participate actively in their learning by raising questions, summarizing, making connections, etc.
7. **Creates a record or text that can be either private or shared**: Students can integrate informal writing into formal writing projects and test preparation.

As stated previously, the more students understand the material, the stronger their formal writing becomes. Other, relatively minor pedagogical adjustments also lead to improvements in mechanical mistakes. Some instructors worry there is no room for adding writing given all the “content” they must deliver. However, the negligible, if any, trade-off in content is offset by the deeper gains in learning brought about active, writing-centered pedagogy (Langer & Applebee, 1987; Marshall, 1987; Selfe & Arbabi, 1986).

McLeod and Shirley's (1987) survey confirmed Griffin's (1985) findings. McLeod and Shirley noted that the 427 institutions with WAC programs employed a range of components including faculty workshops/seminars, follow-up meetings with faculty, writing centers, writing fellows, a program director or resident writing consultant, an all-university writing committee, a WAC advisory committee, in-house WAC publications, informal but regular gatherings, outside speakers or consultants, and a writing center or tutorials for students.

In addition to these components, McLeod and Shirley (1987) found that schools used a range of curricular elements including a WAC freshman composition course, upper-division writing-intensive courses in the English department, upper-division writing-intensive courses taught in other departments, and adjunct writing classes attached to courses in other disciplines.

Writing-in-the-Disciplines or WID

By the late 1980s, WAC became popular, nearly a fad. This often led to the “top-down” programs that had “shallow” administrative support and weak faculty buy-in (White, 1990). Some scholarship emerged on how to sustain WAC programs beyond the initial enthusiasm of early adaptors and their first few years of enthusiastic participation (McLeod & Soven, 1992). One somewhat critical review essay written by Charles Bazerman (1991) challenged writing researchers to engage in more rigorous, in-depth research of communication practices in particular fields. A line of inquiry emerged in the 1990s focused on studying academic and professional communication using naturalistic and textual studies. “Academic writing” was found not to be a monolithic form that students can learn early on and easily transfer to new situations. By analyzing students' writing assignments across various college courses, McCarthy (1987) observed that each discipline has its own conventions of language use and that these conventions must be taught to students so that they might successfully participate in distinct

academic discourse communities. Herrington (1985) found that expectations for “good writing” can vary from classroom to classroom in the same discipline, since individual professors often hold very idiosyncratic assumptions about language use, based largely on their own experiences as students and professionals.

Numerous studies were published that examined professional or expert writing in various professions and disciplines. Studying the way scientists sought funding through proposals and secured acceptance of their research through journal articles, conferences, and popularizations, Myers (1990) argued that science writing has a persuasive dimension, is rhetorical in nature, and actively shapes the construction of scientific knowledge (contrary to the view that science writing passively transmits pre-existing ideas). Bazerman (1981) compared the rhetorical strategies of research articles in the three branches of knowledge, the sciences, humanities, and social sciences. While finding some generic similarities in form, the types of argument and style for each branch were significantly different. Studies of writing in nearly every academic discipline have been conducted and are continually being published, many co-authored with specialists in the fields being studied (see Russell, 1997, 2001).

This research contributed to the development of an emphasis in WAC programs known as “learning-to-write” or “writing in the disciplines” (WID). Writing intensive courses that incorporate a WID approach add the following goals in addition to the writing-to-learn approach:

1. Focus on better understanding and teaching forms of writing within specific discourse communities (e.g., writing as a scientist, engineer, etc.)
2. Practice professional communication
3. Practice thinking and research skills relevant to analysis in the discipline
4. Integrate and analyze course content in formal “transactional” writing
5. Prepare students for a range of careers in the field
6. Assign reports, research article review essays, and research papers

Some “theory wars” erupted in the WAC scholarship over which approach was more effective, writing-to-learn, which emphasizes informal writing as a tool for learning, or learning-to-write, which emphasizes socializing students into specific fields through instruction in their genres, or forms of written communication. Because of these theoretical and historical distinctions, it is common to see variations of WAC programs called “WID” programs or “WAC/WID” programs. However, these distinctions are largely artificial. Most WAC courses incorporate both emphases, as writing in any form begins with informal writing and ends with formal writing. Faculty should be familiar with both approaches. Writing-to-learn strategies would be more appropriate in some courses, such as general education courses taught to non-majors. Likewise, it might be more appropriate to emphasize learning-to-write approaches in courses taught to majors.

Research Supporting WAC

In *Our Underachieving Colleges*, former Harvard president Derek Bok (2006) examines the key goals that colleges and universities should aspire to, naming learning how to communicate as among the most important. Devoting one chapter to the topic, Bok reviews a number of studies on the effectiveness of writing instruction in higher education, concluding that “college helps some but by no means all students improve their writing ability....There is clearly room for improvement” (p. 90). After pointing to shortcomings with the traditional one or two course freshman composition sequence, including the reality that one course is not enough to develop proficiency in any skill and that freshman composition programs rely too heavily on teaching assistants and part-time instructors, Bok identifies WAC as one promising solution. In discussing the commitment to teaching that WAC entails, Bok writes

Even students who have many papers to write may make limited progress unless their instructors give them ample, timely feedback, not only on the substance of the papers but also on the quality of the writing. In an ideal world, professors would provide such comments as a matter of course. In reality, however, many professors do not pay close attention to student writing, nor are they necessarily trained to attend to the subtler problems of composition. Often they do not even read student papers themselves but leave the task to teaching assistants who are less qualified than they to evaluate student writing.

Adequate feedback will rarely come about through exhortation from on high; more substantial efforts are needed to engage faculty members from a variety of disciplines in reading and critiquing student papers. As a practical matter, few professors will accept this added responsibility for very long or perform it conscientiously and well unless they have adequate training and receive appropriate rewards in the form of extra salary or added teaching credit. Since competent writing is so important, the investment seems well worth the cost. (p. 99)

Some of the studies of gains in undergraduate writing ability cited by Bok include Whitla (1978) and Sommers and Saltz (2004). When comparing gains between the freshman year and senior year among students at a community college, liberal arts college, and research university, Whitla (1978) found some improvement in student writing but that the gains were most uneven for students at the research university. The writing of humanities majors improved the most, social science majors improved somewhat, but science majors mostly failed to improve and in some cases regressed (Bok, p. 89). Sommers and Saltz (2004) tracked the writing of 400 Harvard students through college and found that improvements in writing ability depended on the amount of writing, amount of feedback students received, students’ familiarity with subject matter, and the degree of ownership that students had with the subject (i.e., “an opportunity to explore the issues that matter most to them and to figure out why they matter”). Another study not mentioned by Bok found that “there is a highly significant contribution of the curricular emphasis on writing that comes through strongly when pre-existing writing skill level is controlled” (Ridley & Smith, 2006).

As mentioned previously, if a WAC program can show it has led to teaching that produces better student writing (providing timely feedback, allowing for revision, crafting good assignments, etc.), it follows that student writing will improve (Hughes, 1996). There have been numerous studies documenting how faculty involved in WAC programs have altered their teaching to include WAC-based strategies. Walvoord et al. (1997) reported on a longitudinal, qualitative study of three WAC programs and over 700 faculty. Most of the faculty involved in their study reported adopting WAC methods that enhanced student learning. Faculty who adopted WAC methods to varying degrees also tended to express higher levels of teaching satisfaction (Walvoord et al., 1997; see also Thaiss & Zawacki, 2006).

In a *Review of Educational Research* article, Ochsner and Fowler (2004) are skeptical of the claims made by WAC scholarship. They write, “Although some common measures of assessment have been used to establish participant satisfaction, student achievement as a result of writing-to-learn and learning-to-write pedagogy has been minimal at best and needs further investigation” (p. 117). It appears that Ochsner and Fowler mostly quibble with writing across the curriculum’s assertion of the primacy of writing as a mode of learning over speaking, listening, and reading, arguing that “no aggregate of studies provides a compelling case for emphasizing writing as a unique tool for learning” (p. 122). They further assert that as “a principle of instruction, all students should learn to write—but not all students will learn best through writing” (p. 125). Ochsner and Fowler also point out that writing-based pedagogies can even be detrimental to learning and learning how to write in the absence of pedagogical intervention. Citing a study by Penrose (1992), the authors concede that higher-order learning (interpretation, analysis, problem-solving) does seem to benefit from writing-based instruction. Ochsner and Fowler conclude by arguing for the importance of multimodal learning rather than a “unimodal” reliance on writing (p. 131). They also call for more student outcomes-based assessment. WAC scholars have generally disputed the review essay, pointing out among other shortcomings that Ochsner and Fowler’s own sample of 75 articles is somewhat selective and limited given the hundreds of articles published on WAC since the early 1970s (see, e.g., Anson, Schwiebert, and Williamson, 1993). WAC scholars also point out that much of the WAC research acknowledges the same methodological complexities of studying the development of writing ability that Ochsner and Fowler cite as weaknesses in the research.

Partly because of the view that writing is but one type of learning, as Ochsner and Fowler (2004) argue, and partly because WAC has often been imitated by similar educational initiatives, such as speaking across the curriculum or critical thinking across the curriculum, some WAC programs in the 1990s began to combine with other educational reform initiatives. These pairings were often theoretically motivated, but they were also often politically motivated, as funding for WAC “dried up” in the 1990s when other initiatives became more popular. One such initiative gaining ground in the nineties was computer technology. Reiss, Selfe, and Young (1998) published a collection of essays called *Electronic Communication Across the Curriculum*, which focused on how WAC programs were experimenting with pedagogical techniques for teaching writing in the disciplines using new information technologies such as email, synchronous and asynchronous conferencing, multimedia, and the World Wide Web.

The focus on “electronic communication across the curriculum” (ECAC) gained notoriety and some WAC programs began to refashion themselves as “communication across the curriculum” (CAC) programs in acknowledgement of the view that while writing is the primary mode of communication in a literate society, other modes of communication, including oral, digital, and visual, interact with writing during social action and these multiple modes of communication can be used in concert with writing to enhance the acquisition of critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities (Reiss, Selfe, and Young, 1998).

Resurgence of Interest in WAC Programs

The last decade has seen a new wave of interest (and support) for writing across the curriculum:

- 1997: North Carolina starts a [Campus Speaking and Writing Program](#)
- 1999: Duke University creates a separate unit called the [University Writing Program](#) that includes first-year and WID-emphasis WI courses taught by interdisciplinary post-doctoral fellows
- 2001: Clemson is named the [Time/Princeton Review college of the year](#) for the strength of its WAC program (housed in its endowment-funded Pearce Center for Professional Communication)
- 2002: *US News and World Report* starts [ranking the best “writing in the disciplines” programs](#), including among its list several public research universities such as Colorado State, University of Iowa, Indiana University, Purdue University, Michigan, UCLA, Missouri-Columbia, and Washington State
- 2005-2007: Several schools under the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools focus their accreditation mandated, institution-wide “Quality Enhancement Plans” on writing across the curriculum.

WAC programs have also begun to receive higher levels of external funding than ever before:

- 1987: The University of Minnesota receives a \$1 million gift to support its Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Writing (home to a 4-course WI requirement) (see <http://writing.umn.edu/>).
- 1989: Clemson receives a \$2 million gift to start the Pearce Center for Professional Communication (see <http://www.clemson.edu/caah/pearce/>).
- 2004: LSU receives \$5 million to start a Communication Across the Curriculum (“CxC”) program (see <http://appl003.lsu.edu/acadaff/cxcweb.nsf/index>).
- 2004: The University of Denver receives \$4 million to improve undergraduate education. After a two-year period of study, the university decides to use the money to support writing instruction university-wide, hiring Dougless Hesse, a well-known composition researcher, to direct a university-wide writing program (see <http://www.du.edu/writing/>).

- 2006: Miami of Ohio University receives a \$10.5 million gift for its Center for Writing Excellence (see <http://www.units.muohio.edu/cwe/>).

The causes for a renewed interest in writing are generally tied to yet another perceived literacy crisis among college students and recent college graduates. Many experts believe employer dissatisfaction is strongly connected to growth of the Internet and e-mail as modes of communication in industry. A number of recent surveys, reports, and news stories have contributed to a heightened amount of attention on the importance of strong communication skills:

- “More Employers Demand Better E-Mail Writing Skills” (Goforth, 2001)
- “E-mail Exposes the Literacy Gap” (Donovan, 2002)
- The [National Commission on Writing](#) (NCW) formed by the College Board in 2002
- “Why Johnny Can’t Write, Even Though He Went to Princeton” (Bartlett, 2003)
- “Writing in the New Academy” (*Peer Review*, Fall 2003)
- “Writing: A Ticket to Work . . . Or a Ticket Out” (2004 NCW report based on surveys of 120 major American corporations)
- “Writing: A Powerful Message from State Government” (2005 NCW report based on surveys of state human resource divisions)

Due to e-mail and other computer-mediated tools for communication, which are indicative of the larger shift to a global information economy, strong writing skills are more important than ever. The contemporary relationship between computer literacy and written literacy also give credence to WAC’s evolution toward ECAC and CAC. (It is up to the institution to decide if it wants to reinforce theoretical distinctions between WAC and CAC in how it names its program.)

At the same time, however, faculty and employers have been complaining about student compositional skills long before the first freshman composition requirements were instituted at Harvard in the 1880s. Mike Rose (1985), a well-known literacy researcher, writes of the “myth of transience,” the belief that writing is a basic skill that should only require remediation in college. According to Rose,

Despite the accretion of crisis reports, the belief persists in the American university that if we can just do *x* or *y*, the [literacy] problem will be solved—in five years, ten years, or a generation—and higher education will be able to return to its real work. But entertain me with the possibility that such peaceful reform is a chimera.

Each generation of academicians facing the characteristic American shifts in demographics and accessibility sees the problem anew, laments it in terms of the era, and optimistically notes its impermanence. No one seems to say that this scenario has gone on for so long that it might not be temporary. That, in fact, there will probably always be a significant percentage of students who do not meet some standard [of literacy]...Like any golden age or utopian myth, the myth of transience assures its believers that the past was better or that the future will be. (1985, p. 355-356)

Rose argues that writing ability cannot be reduced to a simple skill, but rather it is a complex ability that is highly situational and requires constant reinforcement and feedback. Rose (1985) further argues that the perception of student writing as a “problem” will not be improved unless higher education drastically rethinks its assumptions about writing and writing instruction. As McCarthy’s (1987) study of college writers showed, students have difficulty applying the compositional skills learned in first-year writing courses to other college courses. Studies of professionals have demonstrated that even accomplished writers struggle with new forms and situations (Smart, 2000). Rose (1985) advocates for writing across the curriculum but argues that reductionist thinking about writing instruction in college as a largely remedial enterprise prevents most faculty from thinking seriously about incorporating writing throughout the curriculum.

Features of “Enduring” WAC Programs

Given the challenges of integrating writing instruction across the curriculum described by Russell (2002), White (1990), and Rose (1985), what steps can an institution take to ensure the success of its WAC program? Miraglia and McLeod (1997) conducted a survey of what they called “enduring” WAC programs, those among the 418 programs reported on in McLeod and Shirley (1987) that were still in existence in the late 1990s (106 of the 418 programs reported continued existence). Miraglia and McLeod were interested in identifying what characteristics contributed to the prolonged existence of those programs, and conversely, what absence of characteristics could contribute to the demise of a WAC program. Miraglia and McLeod identified three factors contributing to the longevity of WAC programs:

1. **Administrative support**—Lack of administrative support or lack of funding were the most often named factors leading to the end of a WAC program.
2. **Grassroots/faculty support**—Programs that reported widespread faculty participation were still in existence. Programs that failed often cited faculty resistance as a factor.
3. **Strong, consistent program leadership**—“Program leadership manifests in many ways” writes Miraglia and McLeod (1997), including “multiple components, curricular elements, and assessment strategies” (p. 48). Enduring programs also retained some type of program director or administrator: “fully two-thirds of the enduring programs have had either the same WAC director or only two directors in the past decade” (p. 56).

For a WAC program to succeed, then, it must have both administrative support as well as faculty support. Faculty need incentives and rewards for participating in a WAC program, money which comes from a “hard” budget that funds mainly faculty development but also administrative costs including a director, assistant staff, and operating expenses. According to Miraglia and McLeod (1997), the most successful WAC programs identify faculty priorities and synchronize them with program goals; enduring WAC programs investigate faculty needs and priorities and initiate collaborative efforts to respond accordingly. Effective WAC programs create a culture that

values writing. A successful WAC program needs a knowledgeable director, but also relies on leadership from others, including experienced faculty and community leaders. Successful WAC programs are multi-faceted, employing a range of components and curricular elements. Miraglia and McLeod point to the curricular element as a key factor contributing to program longevity.

Miraglia and McLeod's study provides evidence in favor of UNLV adopting additional writing requirements beyond the freshman composition sequence. The next section examines the question closer to home, reviewing several sources of information relevant to the state of undergraduate writing at UNLV.

4. The State of Undergraduate Writing at UNLV

One of the main activities of the UNLV WAC steering committee was to determine the “state of undergraduate writing at UNLV.” The objectives of the Committee in conducting this research were as follows:

- Gather information about the current quality of undergraduate writing abilities
- Gather information about current writing requirements and practices in various departments
- Gather information about faculty and student attitudes about writing
- Identify positive practices, and determine areas that could be improved

It is believed by the committee that such information has the following uses:

- Present a compelling argument for or against the belief that a problem exists in the quality of undergraduate writing
- Show what resources and practices are already in place, which could contribute to a plan to enhance whatever structures are already present

Starting in the summer of 2006, the committee began collecting information from the following sources:

- Freshman composition program
- Employer attitudes (through Career Services)
- Results of National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
- Results from graduate exams (e.g., GMAT, GRE, LSAT)
- Department assessment reports
- Department chairs
- Faculty attitudes and use of writing in the classroom
- UNLV Writing Center
- UNLV Teaching and Learning Center

Freshman Composition

The results of the composition program’s fall 2005 assessment report indicate that UNLV freshman are generally writing at par with students who take the same standardized exam nationally. However, the composition program can only tell us how students are writing at the

“freshman” level, and not how those students are writing when they leave UNLV. Nor do the results tell us much about how well students are doing at writing the more complex forms of writing valued in college.

The composition program submitted a fall 2005 assessment report that measured six outcomes associated with college-level writing ability:

1. Focus on purpose
2. Respond to needs of audiences and to different kinds of rhetorical situations
3. Organize ideas for clarity and effectiveness
4. Adopt an appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality
5. Implement strategies of argument, and analyze and evaluate reasons and evidence
6. Control surface features such as syntax, grammar, and punctuation

The report refers to data collected fall 2004 through fall 2005. While the exact sampling procedures from to semester to semester are not detailed, the report is based on “approximately 3500 writing skills tests, 2500 essay tests, and 1500 critical thinking tests” (Fall 2005 assessment report available at http://www.unlv.edu/Provost/Assessment/reports_general.htm).

The composition program used the nationally standardized Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) exam by American College Testing Organization (ACT). The exam can be customized by institution, and UNLV elected to use three measures:

1. A 72-question, 40-minute multiple-choice “writing skills” test, which measures usage and mechanics (punctuation, basic grammar and usage, and sentence structure, 44% of test) and rhetorical skills (organization, awareness of audience and purpose, and style; 56% of test)
2. An essay test, which includes two 20-minute writing tasks defined by a short prompt that identifies a specific hypothetical situation upon which writers must argue a position addressed to a hypothetical audience. Each essay is rated by 2 readers trained to apply a holistic 6-point scale. The four scores are averaged into a score from 1 to 6 in increments of .5.
3. A 32-question, 40-minute multiple-choice critical thinking test which measures student ability to clarify, analyze, evaluate, and extend arguments. Students must answer questions related to four argument-based reading passages.

According to the assessment report, students scored satisfactory when compared to national means on 5 of the 6 outcomes. The one outcome where students scored below national norms was “control of surface features.” Of the three goals related to that objective—punctuation, basic grammar and usage, and sentence structure—students scored satisfactory in both punctuation and sentence structure but 6% below the national norm in basic grammar and usage. ACT considers any difference between 5-10% a “moderate” deviation from the national norm (differences less

than 5% are considered negligible, differences greater than 10% are considered substantial) (see Table below).

Outcome A: Focus on a purpose			
CAAP Test	Local	National	Evaluation
Writing Essay: Essay 1	3.2	3.3	Satisfactory
Writing Essay: Essay 2	3.1	3.4	Satisfactory
Outcome B: Respond to the needs of different audiences and to different kinds of rhetorical situations			
CAAP Test	Local	National	Evaluation
Writing Skills: Strategy	67%	64%	Good
Writing Essay: Essay 1	3.2	3.3	Satisfactory
Writing Essay: Essay 2	3.1	3.4	Satisfactory
Outcome C: Organize ideas for clarity and effectiveness			
CAAP Test	Local	National	Evaluation
Writing Skills: Organization	84%	86%	Satisfactory
Writing Essay: Essay 1	3.2	3.3	Satisfactory
Writing Essay: Essay 2	3.1	3.4	Satisfactory
Outcome D: Adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality			
CAAP Test	Local	National	Evaluation
Writing Skills: Style	69%	70%	Satisfactory
Outcome F: Implement strategies of argument; analyze and evaluate reasons and evidence			
CAAP Test	Local	National	Evaluation
Critical Thinking	62	62.7	Satisfactory
Outcome J: Control surface features such as syntax, grammar, and punctuation			
CAAP Test	Local	National	Evaluation
Punctuation	63%	66%	Satisfactory
Basic Grammar & Usage	65%	71%	Needs improvement
Sentence Structure	67%	69%	Satisfactory

Source: Fall 2005 Composition Program Assessment Report

These results are encouraging insofar as we can claim that UNLV students write at a level similar to students taking the CAAP exam nationally. However, these scores are not benchmarked to peer institutions. We can suppose, though, that students are taking these tests at institutions with lower as well as higher admissions standards than UNLV's.

The CAPP exam consists of both indirect (multiple choice questions) and direct (timed essay exam) measures of writing ability. Although the timed essay portion of the CAAP exam does provide valuable practice for taking similar exams in other courses and on exams such as the GRE, it is not as useful for assessing proficiency in complex writing. The National Council of Teachers of English opposes such standardized exams on the grounds that (1) indirect measures of writing are problematic and (2) timed essay exams are an invalid measure of writing ability because timed, impromptu writing encourages superficial and formulaic writing, whereas college writing teachers encourage in-depth and complex writing that can only be achieved through extensive planning, revising, and editing (NCTE). Students are expected to leave ENG 102 being capable of writing researched, argumentative papers of considerable length. The CAAP exam is therefore a problematic assessment tool for the Eng 102 argumentative-research writing course, where there is a disconnect between the complex writing that students do during the term and the formulaic writing by which they are assessed on a timed essay. (Students pay an additional \$26 fee in ENG 102 to subsidize this exam.)

A key limitation with looking to the composition program for information about UNLV student writing ability is that the composition program only measures the writing abilities of freshman writers, or writers writing at a “freshman level.” It is equally problematic to make inferences regarding overall undergraduate writing based on the assessment of first-year writing students, which provides no data regarding the progress (or lack thereof) in writing proficiency from the first year to the senior year.

According to Stephen Brown, the Director of Freshman Composition and Member of the WAC Steering Committee, the CAAP exam is useful in providing data on how UNLV students stack-up versus their peers nationwide, but it should be augmented with other assessment vehicles that more accurately assess proficiency of complex writing (term paper, portfolio, etc). The Composition Program endorses the National Council of Teacher’s of English opposition to timed essay assessments. While not mentioned in the fall 2005 assessment report, the CAAP exam is but one of several assessment vehicles that the Composition Program uses (or has used) to gauge student writing, including an in-house portfolio pilot, term papers, and locally scored essay exams.

Brown supports WAC on the grounds that if writing proficiency is the desired goal, then students must be given more opportunities to write complexly at every level of their academic careers, from the first-year to graduation (and required to do so). Brown also believes that to accurately assess writing proficiency at UNLV, resources must be put in place to generate the diverse methodologies by which that proficiency can more accurately be assessed.

Career Service’s Employer Satisfaction Surveys

The results from several years’ worth of employer surveys indicate that employers interviewing UNLV students on campus rate the candidates’ written communication and oral communication/interpersonal skills the lowest.

According to the Career Service Center:

Our students are rated above average by employers in most surveyed categories, but have to live up to higher expectations in several areas of importance to the employers recruiting on the UNLV campus. *The data continues to emphasize the critical need to develop students' written communication skills and effective communication and interpersonal skills, both of which continue to be the lowest ranked qualities for our students year after year.* ([Employer Activities Report 2005-2006](#), p. 31; emphasis added)

These results are consistent with employer surveys nationally. The most recent include two surveys, published in 2004 and 2005 by the National Commission on Writing, which asserted that corporations and government employers (1) find writing to be a “threshold skill” essential to hiring and promotion decisions, and (2) are spending billions on improving employee writing deficiencies.

Written Communication Skills

The Career Service center administers a voluntary “On-Campus Recruiting Survey” to employers. For 2005-2006, 17 employers completed the survey (10% of the 164 employer visits). Of those employers, 10 (59%) were business, 3 (18%) represented the hospitality industry, and 2 each (12%) were in engineering and education (Clark County School District).

The first part of the survey, “Resume and Candidate Credentials,” asks employers to rate on a 7-point scale the importance of 9 skills and attributes and then to evaluate the performance of UNLV students in these 9 areas. The following tables are taken from page 9 and 10 of the '05-06 Employer Activities Report.

Chart A shows that, as the caption states, “written communication” skills showed the greatest disparity between employer value and estimation of student performance.

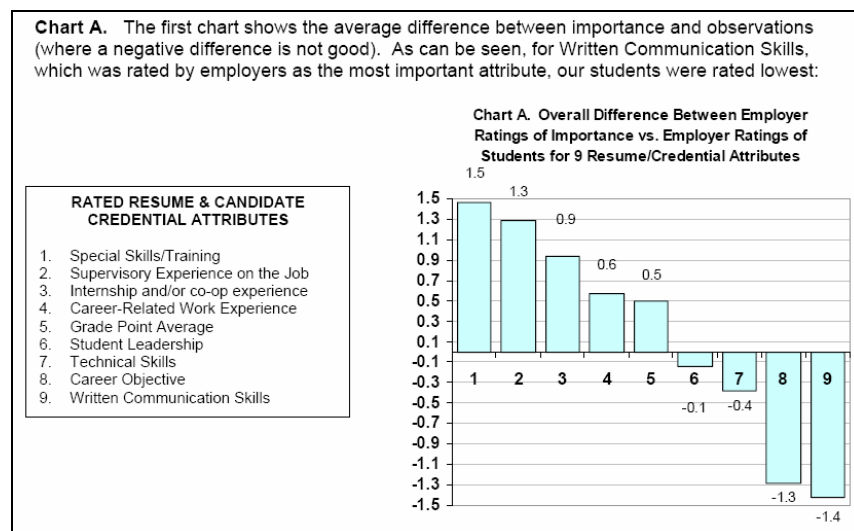
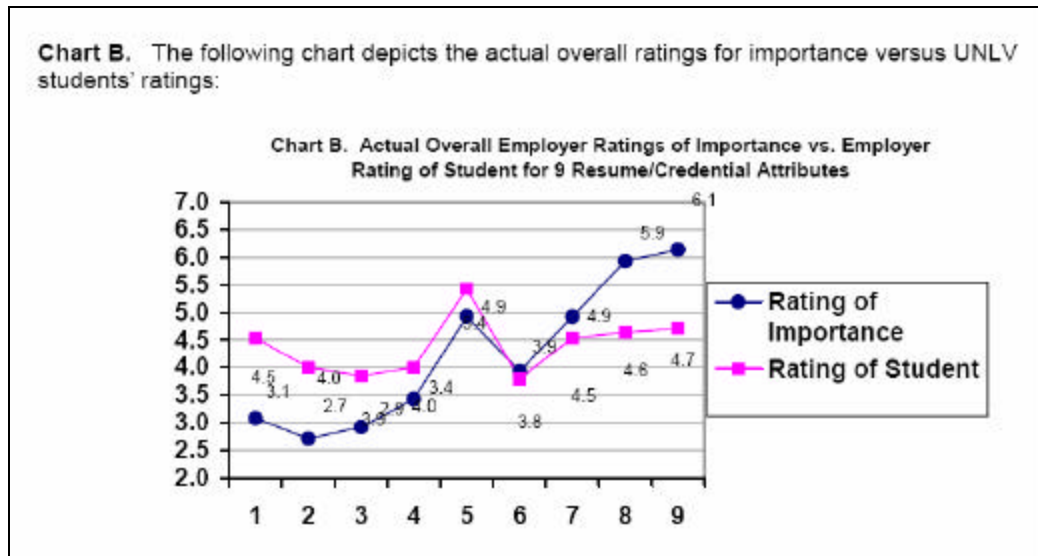


Chart B shows that, according to the report,

UNLV candidates overall met or exceeded employer expectations in 5 of the 9 categories of the Resume and Candidate Credentials screening process. Ratings for students for 7 of 9 categories were rated “Good” or higher. In the worst category, Written Communication Skills, students actually were rated Good to Very Good (“4.71”), but employers believed the importance of written communication skills was even higher (“6.14”). (p. 9)



While the report considers a score of 4.7 “good” performance, on a 7-point scale 4.7 equates to a percentage rating of 67%.

These results are consistent with previous surveys that had higher response rates (2004-2005 employer satisfaction survey response rate 19%, or 25 of 133 employer visits; 2003-2004 survey response rate 24%, or 23 of 95 visits; 2002-2003 survey response rate of 31%, 29 of 94 visits). In the 02-03 survey, written communication skills were rated second most important (next to GPA), but as with more recent surveys, scored the worst in the importance/performance rating.

Oral Communication/Interpersonal Skills

The second section of the employer satisfaction survey, “Career and Interview Preparation,” asks recruiters to rate the importance of career and interview preparation areas when interviewing candidates. As with the first part, employers also score how UNLV students perform in relation to these skill areas.

Employers rated “communication/interpersonal skills” as the most important and “orientation toward teamwork,” another communication skill, as second most important. According to the 2005-2006 report,

Candidates overall did not meet employer expectations in Career and Interview Preparation. Our students met or exceeded the importance rating given by employers in only two areas (“Flexibility with regard to position and location”, and “Ability to apply previous work experience to company needs”). For the 11 other areas, students did not meet employers’ expectations. “Effective communication/interpersonal skills” received the worst rating (fourth year in a row). p #

As Chart C shows, effective oral communication/interpersonal skills scored the lowest compared to the value that employers placed on this skill. One could also consider the second lowest scoring skill set, “orientation towards teamwork,” or the ability to work in groups, as another weak communication skill.

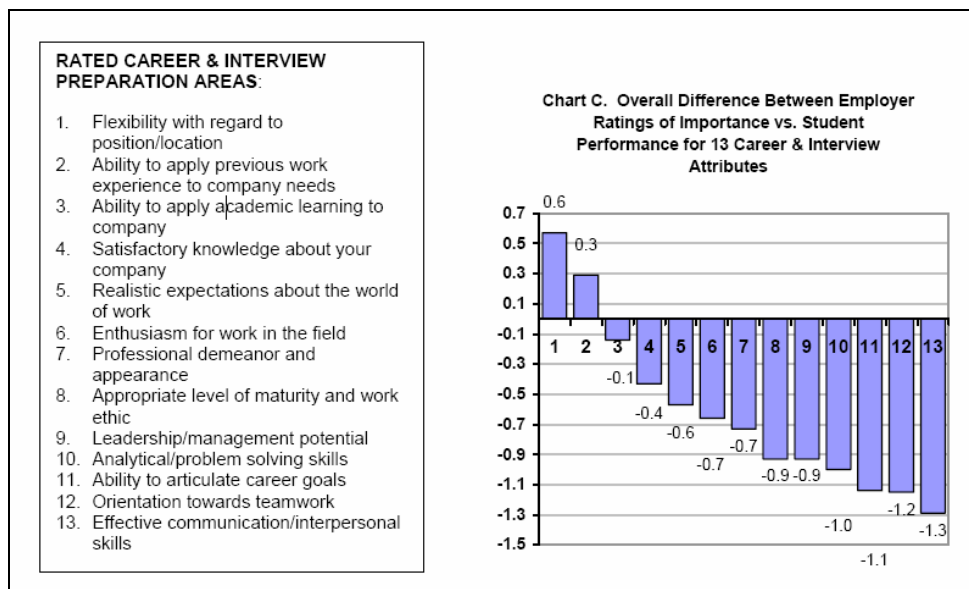
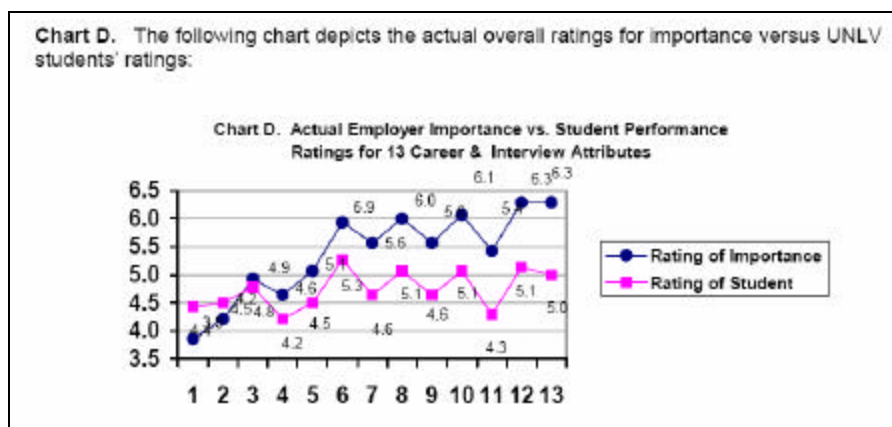


Chart D below shows the disparity in ratings between employer importance and student performance. Students were rated “5” compared to the importance rating of 6.3. Percentage-wise, this amounts to 70% score, slightly higher than student written communication skills, but still in the “C” range.



These results show that student written and oral communication skills (defined broadly to include speaking and interpersonal skills) are weak and deserve attention. That writing and “communication” skills were singled out as weak—or weaker than valued—lends support for a broader “communication across the curriculum” initiative.

National Survey of Student Engagement

Each year since 2000 the Pew Foundation-supported National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) collects information from undergraduates at colleges and universities across the country to assess the extent to which students engage in variety of effective educational practices. Unlike other student satisfaction surveys such as the Noel-Levitz survey, which aim to measure students’ satisfaction with the services provided by an institution, the NSSE survey aims to measure student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development. The NSSE survey has been singled out by many professional bodies as a promising and valuable assessment tool, especially when it comes to measuring general education outcomes (Bok, 2007).

There are 12 questions related to written and oral communication:

- (1) Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- (2) Made a class presentation
- (3) Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in
- (4) Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources
- (5) Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more
- (6) Number of written papers or reports between 5 and 19 pages
- (7) Number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages
- (8) Used an electronic medium (listserv, chat group, Internet, instant messaging, etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment
- (9) Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor
- (10) Writing clearly and effectively (outcome)
- (11) Speaking clearly and effectively (outcome)
- (12) Working effectively with others (outcome)

As indicated above, questions 5, 6, and 7 can provide some corroboration by students as to how much writing is being assigned by departments and faculty. Question 4 relates to the assumption that writing products and writing ability improves when the writer has the opportunity to receive feedback and revise the writing. That students should be permitted to revise a portion of their writing is a typical guideline or requirement for schools that have “writing intensive”

requirements. Questions 10, 11, and 12 ask the students to evaluate how much they believed their communication skills improved as a result of their college experiences.

In spring 2006, 557 colleges and universities participated in the administration of the NSSE survey, including UNLV for the first time. UNLV is participating in the NSSE Urban consortium, which includes potential benchmark schools such as SUNY Buffalo, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, University of Colorado Denver, Wayne State, and Wright State.

Unfortunately, UNLV had only 157 freshman and 190 seniors take the NSSE in 2006 (or a total of 347 students), which equals an 11% overall response rate and amounts to a 5.2% sampling error. The results, therefore, can not be considered reliable.

(The average institutional response rate for NSSE 2006 was 35%. The 2006 NSSE Institutional Report is available online at http://nsse.iub.edu/html/2006_inst_report.cfm).

Largely because of the costs associated with the survey (\$7,500), the Student Services Assessment committee originally planned on administering the survey every three years. So, the next NSSE survey is being planned for 2009, budget permitting. Because the NSSE includes a focus on the academic experience and because the results can be used for many assessment purposes, certainly UNLV should support this tool by ensuring funding for it on a more regular basis.

Graduate Exams

Another measure of student communication skills can come from the graduate-level standardized GMAT, GRE, and LSAT tests. The GMAT, which is used primarily for MBA program admissions, includes three parts: quantitative section, verbal section, and an analytical writing assessment. The GRE General test measures verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and analytical writing skills. The LSAT consists of reading comprehension, analytical reasoning, logical reasoning (2 sections), and a writing sample (unscored). Naturally, we would be most curious to see how UNLV students compare nationally and perhaps to benchmark schools on the verbal and writing portions of the GMAT and GRE.

According to Harriet E. Barlow, Associate Dean for Graduate Student Services in the Graduate College, the graduate college does not keep track of graduate exam test scores, particularly separate scores for each part of the exams, for a number of reasons, including scores are sent directly to the registrar and the graduate college technically does not require scores. It is the individual departments that establish test score requirements.

GMAT

We received from the Graduate Management Admission Council a three-year summary of UNLV graduates who took the GMAT compared to examinees who reported scores to UNLV. The table below shows that UNLV students overall performed slightly worse than students from

other institutions who reported scores to UNLV. Given GMAT-provided standard norms of a mean score of 47%, or 526.6, and an 80th percentile score of 640, UNLV students perform below national norms (date of mean scores provided by GMAT not available). According to Intuitional Analysis and Planning, there were 5,688 seniors enrolled in fall 2005, so the 266 students who took the GMAT in 2005 represents an estimated 5% of the population likely to take this or similar graduate entrance exam. In its most recent correspondence, the GMAT stated that it does not provide institutions with benchmarking data on each part of the exam.

GMAT [®] Examinees by Score Category and Testing Year UNLV-Las Vegas Graduates Testing Years 2003 to 2005						
	TY 2003		TY 2004		TY 2005	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Less than 500	137	55.0%	140	53.2%	138	51.9%
500 to 540	52	20.9%	57	21.7%	49	18.4%
550 to 590	35	14.1%	39	14.8%	43	16.2%
600 to 640	9	3.6%	19	7.2%	26	9.8%
650 to 690	14	5.6%	5	1.9%	6	2.3%
700 and Above	2	0.8%	3	1.1%	4	1.5%
Total	249	100.0%	263	100.0%	266	100.0%

GMAT [®] Examinees by Score Category and Testing Year Examinees who sent score reports to UNLV-Las Vegas Testing Years 2003 to 2005						
	TY 2003		TY 2004		TY 2005	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Less than 500	250	46.7%	259	43.5%	252	44.8%
500 to 540	110	20.6%	111	18.7%	112	19.9%
550 to 590	79	14.8%	104	17.5%	92	16.4%
600 to 640	55	10.3%	71	11.9%	58	10.3%
650 to 690	29	5.4%	32	5.4%	30	5.3%
700 and Above	12	2.2%	18	3.0%	18	3.2%
Total	535	100.0%	595	100.0%	562	100.0%

Unfortunately, this information does not provide much insight into students' communication skills other than the inference that the small population of UNLV students who took the GMAT in 2003-2005 likely performed poorer on the verbal and analytical writing portions than peers at other institutions.

During the discussion of the GMAT scores at the October 6, 2007 WAC retreat, one participant noted that when compared to the results of the Freshman Composition CAAP exam, it appears that UNLV students' writing abilities may be dropping off between the freshman and senior years.

GRE

In spring 2007 we also received from Educational Testing Service their Graduate Record Exam “Undergraduate Institution Summary Statistics Reports” for 2004-2005. The reports included an institution report and separate department reports. According to the 1-page institution report, 201 students who took the GRE between July 2004 and June 2005 reported UNLV as their institution. The mean score for the GRE verbal among these students was 467, whereas the national mean was 476 (through 2004-2005). The mean score for the GRE quantitative among UNLV students was 560, whereas the national mean was 593.

The analytical writing section was added to the GRE in 2002. The exams are scored on a scale of 1-6 in increments of .5. For 2004-2005, the mean score for UNLV students who took the analytical writing portion of the GRE was 4. The national mean in this same period was 4.3.

So, just as with the GMAT data, the GRE scores indicate that UNLV students are performing slightly below national means on these standardized graduate entrance exams, but not by margins considered significant enough to warrant a “crisis” in UNLV graduates’ verbal or analytical writing skills. (We were unable to obtain data on LSAT scores by the writing of this report.)

Department Assessment Reports

The Committee understands that when it comes to assessment, the university is in the midst of a “radical” change in culture when it comes to integrating meaningful assessment into programmatic practices. The assessment initiative on campus is largely a result of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities’ 2001 accreditation review, and with the help of new Office of Academic Assessment, most all units on campus have just only recently determined program outcomes, assessment plans, and produced its first assessment reports (fall 2005). These initial assessment reports are considered provisional with the intention that assessment methods employed in this beginning phase will be continually improved upon.

Keeping in mind that UNLV is in the earliest stages of assessment, the Committee analyzed the student learning outcomes and fall 2005 assessment reports of the 87 undergraduate programs in 12 colleges listed on the “assessment plans by college” section of the [Office of Academic Assessment’s website](#). (A review of spring and fall 2006 reports is in progress.)

Most programs have a direct or embedded writing and/or speaking-related communication outcome. A direct outcome is one that explicitly states students will write or speak effectively. An embedded outcome is one that is indirectly incorporated or implied in outcomes associated with field-specific knowledge, such as the following outcome from the Criminal Justice program: “Be able to conduct a research project from beginning to end.” Here, supposedly writing effectively is part of the research process. While the ratio of direct to embedded is about even, more programs have direct outcomes.

Some observations from selected colleges are as follows:

- **Fine Arts:** Architecture specifically noted writing skills as an area in need of improvement, based on employer surveys, grade reports, and an analysis of program application writing samples. The report singled out one course, “AAD 201,” as the focus of efforts to continue writing development.
- **Nursing:** Used a direct assessment of a small sample of papers and presentations, however, noted that a “standard evaluation tool, or set of criteria, might grant a more accurate reflection of students' written communication ability which could be tracked across the levels.”
- **Honors College:** Among the few programs that specifically set its expectations higher as a result of its fall 05 assessment: “to have all our students Strongly Agree that their writing and oral skills are improved because of their participation in Honors” (results based on faculty and student questionnaire to assess its direct communication outcome).
- **Liberal Arts:** History conducted a direct assessment of a sampling of student writing, though it was not clear if a standard rubric was used. Psychology found students performed considerably lower than expected on their indirect metric (“participation in research activity”) and noted they needed to conduct more direct assessment (“We have concluded that a future procedure in which student’s communications are sampled and evaluated must be developed”). Foreign Languages (French Studies and German Studies) conducted direct assessment of writing (though timed) using external guidelines for proficiency in foreign language writing.
- **College of Sciences:** Chemistry has developed direct and detailed communication outcomes that include discipline-specific sets of sub-goals related to each outcome.
- **University College:** Employed a direct assessment tool, an analytic rubric applied to capstone presentation effectiveness. (Writing effectiveness was apparently not measured in fall 05.)
- **Urban Affairs:** In Environmental Studies, students complete and defend a senior thesis project in capstone undergraduate courses ENV 499A and ENV 499B where more direct assessment is possible.

Many departments identify which courses address particular objectives, including any communication outcomes (Journalism and Media studies is the most systematic, see its assessment plan “part 2”). Several departments have capstone experiences but are not taking advantage of direct assessment of writing in these courses.

Among the general findings from the review of the assessment reports is that most programs that measured communication skills in fall 2005 used indirect methods such as student surveys (exit surveys and course evaluations) and course grades. In cases where course grades were used, they often considered the final grade as the measure of a number of learning outcomes, not just communication skills.

Another finding is that practically all programs reported meeting their own expectations regarding learning outcomes based on these analyses of student self-reports and instructor self-reports (i.e., grades). “The results indicate there is no need to change anything in the program” was a refrain repeated often on the fall 2005 assessment reports.

What do these general observations tell us about students’ communication skills? For one, according to the assessment reports, departments are meeting their own goals in terms of developing students’ communication skills. Judging by these assessment reports alone, there is no pressing need for any sort of writing/communication across the curriculum initiative.

However, most of these reports are based on indirect measures of student writing and speaking. It could be said that programs that rely on student surveys or course grades to evaluate student communication skills are not gaining a full picture of their majors’ abilities. Certainly, grades and student self-reports are useful metrics when assessing outcomes; however, they alone are not considered valid measures of, for our interests, writing (and speaking) ability.

Furthermore, even among the programs that utilized direct assessment measures, standards were set low (“most students will perform above a 3 on a 6-point scale”) and often only nearly met (“most students scored a 3”). Few to no reports recognize borderline performance as an area in need of improvement.

While no program wants to admit deficiencies, part of the goal of assessment is to identify areas that can be improved, even if it means raising standards or identifying areas that are otherwise considered “satisfactory” but that the program stakeholders would like to see made stronger. The assessment “loop,” as it is called, where a program continually strives to improve its outcomes and teaching practices, and can demonstrate continued improvement, is a necessary part of effective assessment practice. Among the few programs that did note areas for improvement, communication skills were cited as an area on more than one occasion.

Certainly, a great many programs, according to the reports, acknowledge the importance of communication skills and incorporate writing and speaking assignments in many classes. This is encouraging and the programs should be lauded. The service, or “value added,” that a WAC program can provide all undergraduate programs is assistance in developing valid, reliable, and relatively efficient direct assessments of student communication skills.

Department Chair's Survey

Toward the end of the summer 2006 term, the WAC Steering Committee distributed a survey to department chairs hoping to gain additional insights about department writing requirements. The survey included 6 questions about department writing requirements, the amount and kind of writing assigned, quality of writing, faculty attitude, feedback from outside constituents, and additional comments.

The survey also included a spreadsheet that asked department chairs (or a department representative) to review syllabi from courses for majors (i.e., excluding service courses) for the spring 2006 semester. The spreadsheet included the following columns:

- Course number and title
- Writing required?
- If YES, type(s) of assignments (e.g., research paper, essay, case analysis, professional document [be specific], journal, etc.)
- If YES, Total # of pages required
- Are students offered the opportunity to revise their papers and improve their grades?
- Number of students enrolled S06 or last semester course was offered
- Does the course include other graded oral presentations?

We believe such a “syllabus review” assessment, though somewhat time-consuming, can be a worthwhile exercise for departments to gauge the amount of writing (and speaking) assigned to its majors. While one could argue that syllabi are not an accurate reflection of a course (a somewhat ironic proposition), a study by Ridley and Smith (2006) showed through statistical analysis that (1) the “syllabus review method” is valid and (2) the amount of writing (judged by the syllabi review method) positively correlates to gains in writing ability from the freshman to senior year. Therefore, while the exact amount of writing necessary to show gains in writing ability is uncertain, it follows that the amount of writing assignments contributes to improvement in writing (though as the literature review discussed, it is not the only contributing factor, see, e.g., Sommers and Saltz, 2004).

A department could conduct a syllabus review to see if it is satisfied with the amount and type of writing (and speaking) assignments. Since merely assigning writing is not enough to improve writing ability, however, a department could also apply the guidelines for writing intensive courses outlined in Part 5 of this report to ascertain how many courses incorporate methods for successful writing instruction. Our syllabus review spreadsheet did this on a limited basis by asking if syllabi indicated opportunities to revise writing and by asking for the types of writing assigned.

We received completed responses from 14 departments: Anthropology, Computer Science, Communication Studies, Economics, Educational Psychology, English, Food and Beverage

Management, History, Psychology, Public Administration, Sports Education Leadership, and Tourism and Convention Management.

Observations from the surveys submitted include the following:

- Currently no writing requirements, although most teachers willingly assign writing
- Variety of discipline-specific kinds of writing assigned, although majority are research papers/reports/essays
- Page requirements average 6-15 pages per course
- No real revision opportunities offered
- Very few oral assignments listed/described
- No concrete findings about the quality of student writing
- Faculty attitudes seem strong overall
- Very little feedback about student writing outside the department
- Chairs consistently like the idea of WAC, as long as it's flexible and well-supported

We have included additional comments to indicate some of the responding chairs' thoughts on WAC (ellipses indicate deletion of possibly identifying information):

- *“Employers, and especially alumni, seem quite satisfied with our majors’ oral communication skills.... Our majors’ written communication skills, as I also said above, are probably on a par with UNLV students generally—which is to say they are lacking.”*
- *“We feel ... that writing is an important part of the curriculum. Many students, however, are not well prepared for writing, and thus it seems desirable to implement a ‘writing across the curriculum’ program.”*
- *“I was at a university that had a writing requirement. Departments were allowed to define the requirements with the stipulations that certain requirements had to be part of the course. In addition, the faculty member had an incentive to participate because we had a cap on the class size that made the activity attractive to the faculty. Any requirement has to permit students to do it in their major and add the advanced level. You must also think about what you would do with distance education courses and degrees. I think our undergraduate degree could possibly become a program done entirely through distance education. The writing requirement could be met in this manner as long as you do not make it inflexible. Please make sure everyone understands there is an expense to this program.”*
- *“...while I think that the idea provides the ultimate goal of our educational effort, practical realities and resource constraints will make the achievement of the ideal a tough go.”*

- *“It is a very worthy goal, but we are not sure how well it would work with the majority of our students who take a course here and a course there. In addition, almost all students transfer credits, most of which are general ed. classes.”*

The findings are similar to the results of the faculty survey we administered (see next section). Writing is being assigned in many courses, but more effective methods of assigning writing could be used. Furthermore, departments generally do not have a clear picture of how well their majors are writing and are not receiving feedback from constituents outside the department. These results suggest that UNLV could benefit from the faculty development and writing assessment aspects of a WAC program.

The response rate for this survey was roughly 22% (13 of 60 departments). While the response rate is low, the responding departments do present a fairly representative cross-section of academic fields. However, because this survey was voluntary, one could argue there is a sampling bias, particularly regarding the observation that these responses suggest that department chairs support the idea of WAC.

Faculty Survey

In the spring 2007 semester, we made an electronic survey available to all faculty and staff using the UNLV Information listserv (the survey was approved by UNLV’s Office for the Protection of Research Subjects). The survey asked 13 close-ended questions and 2 open-ended questions. Respondents could elect to identify their department. Faculty and staff had roughly 3 weeks to respond to the survey, and received e-mail reminders. Because respondents were not required to answer any questions, each question averaged 212 responses.

The response rate for this survey was thus approximately 8%, given the total number of faculty and staff was 2,608 as of November 1, 2006, according to Human Resources (950 faculty including FIRs, 916 GAs, 742 PTIs). PTIs and GAs were the largest percentage to reply to the survey, by rank (45%), followed by Assistant and Associate Professors (15% each rank). Eleven percent (11%) of respondents identified their rank as “Professor.”

The results for questions 2-13 are displayed below (question 1 was an optional question to self-identify department affiliation). The results are discussed following this information.

2. What is your teaching rank?

Part-Time Instructor - 55 (26%)
Graduate Student/Teaching Assistant - 34 (16%)
Assistant Professor - 33 (15%)
Associate Professor - 30 (14%)
Emeritus Associate - 3 (1%)
Professor - 23 (11%)
Lecturer - 11 (5%)

<p>Faculty-in-Residence - 8 (4%) Visiting Professor - 9 (4%) PTI-GA - 6 (3%) Faculty in Residence - Associate - 2 (1%) 214 - Overall Total</p>
<p>3. Do you require writing in any of your undergraduate courses? Yes - 199 (94%) No - 13 (6%) 212 - Overall Total</p>
<p>4. If you answered 'yes,' for question 3, go to question 5. If you answered 'no' for question 3, indicate the conditions which make writing impractical or inappropriate for your courses. (check all that apply) Nature of the course - 8 (4%) Time required to grade written assignments - 7 (3%) Class size - 6 (3%) Teaching writing not my responsibility - 3 (1%) Do not teach undergraduate courses - 2 (1%) Not needed for math courses at the undergraduate level - 1 (0%) The students need writing instruction. It is painful to read their short answers to quiz questions. I did at one time require writing; students appreciated my editing of their answers. - 1 (0%) It is a design studio situation - 1 (0%) The students need writing instruction. It is painful to read their short answers to quiz questions. I did at one time require writing; students appreciated my editing of their answers. - 1 (0%) 216 - Overall Total</p>
<p>5. What course-level do you require writing in? (check all that apply) 400-level - 117 (54%) 100-level - 99 (46%) 300-level - 77 (36%) 200-level - 62 (29%) 216 - Overall Total</p>
<p>6. Which of the following best describe the writing projects you assign? (check all that apply) Reports or papers fewer than 5 pages - 129 (60%) Short answer exam responses (1-5 lines) - 112 (52%) Written responses to readings, textbook questions, etc. - 102 (47%) Long answer exam responses (a few paragraphs or more) - 88 (41%) Reports or papers between 5 and 10 pages - 72 (33%) Journals, freewrites, brainstorming, in-class writing, etc. - 58 (27%) Discipline-specific genres (e.g., proposal, lab report, specifications, etc.) - 33 (15%) Reports or papers between 11 and 19 pages - 30 (14%) Reports or papers 20 pages or more - 7 (3%) News stories - 2 (0%) Research projects - 1 (0%) Explain statistical findings in plain English (not stats-speak) - 1 (0%) Menus, event orders, website evaluation, equipment lists - 1 (0%) Outlines - 1 (0%) Descriptive Applications - 1 (0%) Rhetorical essays - 1 (0%) Press releases - 1 (0%) Proposal letters, banquet event orders, menus, etc. - 1 (0%) Lab reports - 1 (0%) Essays, summaries - 1 (0%)</p>

<p>Rehearsal/lesson plans - 1 (0%) 216 - Overall Total</p>
<p>7. Typically, how much writing do you require of students during a semester? 11-20 pages - 68 (33%) 5-10 pages - 57 (28%) Fewer than 5 pages - 34 (17%) 21-40 pages - 33 (16%) More than 40 pages - 6 (3%) N/A because I do not assign writing - 4 (2%) None of the above - 1 (0%) 8-35 - 1 (0%) I do not assign page numbers - 1 (0%) 205 - Overall Total</p>
<p>8. Do you require or encourage students to revise their written work after receiving feedback from you or others? Yes - 118 (57%) No - 65 (32%) Sometimes - 5 (2%) Depends on assignment - 3 (1%) N/A - 2 (0%) If they ask - 1 (0%) Haven't in the past but probably will next offering - 1 (0%) It is recommended that students discuss writing mistakes and methods of improvement with the Writing Center - 1 (0%) Yes for [...] Senior Design, where draft submittal and review are part of the grade. No for other [...] classes - 1 (0%) Most of what they write is one-liners, so I tell them how to improve their sentences but I don't make them revise it - 1 (0%) Not usually, but for my upper division lab class I'll usually fine 1-2 that I encourage to be revised for submission to a minor journal - 1 (0%) Revise with others prior to assignment due date - 1 (0%) Only if they've failed the assignment - 1 (0%) Feedback on daily written responses are intended for better performance on exam and final paper - 1 (0%) Students are free to see me before they turn the paper in, but after the due date and the paper is graded I don't let students revise their papers. - 1 (0%) When we required more writing, this was integral. With only one paper now, we do not address this. - 1 (0%) Depends on the course - 1 (0%) I make comments on the paper but generally do not require that it be re-written. - 1 (0%) 206 - Overall Total</p>
<p>9. Overall, how would you rate UNLV undergraduates' writing abilities? 3- Weak - 117 (57%) 2- Very Weak - 40 (19%) 4- Good - 35 (17%) 1- Extremely Poor - 13 (6%) 5- Very Good - 2 (1%) 207 - Overall Total</p>
<p>10. Do you support more writing requirements for undergraduates in the major (e.g., requiring students to take upper division courses in the major designated as 'writing intensive,' taught by an expert in that field)? Click on the question mark for a brief overview of 'writing intensive.' Yes - 161 (76%) Undecided - 33 (16%) No - 18 (8%)</p>

212 - Overall Total
<p>11. Do you support more writing requirements for undergraduates as electives (e.g., requiring students to take a certain number of electives designated as 'writing intensive')?</p> <p>Yes - 150 (72%) Undecided - 34 (16%) No - 25 (12%) 209 - Overall Total</p>
<p>12. Do you support more writing requirements for undergraduates in general education (e.g., requiring students to take X-number of courses designated as 'writing intensive' in lower-division general education courses)?</p> <p>Yes - 174 (82%) No - 16 (8%) Undecided - 22 (10%) 212 - Overall Total</p>
<p>13. Do you support requiring students to pass a writing proficiency exam after the sophomore year, such as passing a timed essay exam and/or submitting a portfolio of written assignments?</p> <p>Yes - 117 (55%) Undecided - 48 (23%) No - 47 (22%) 212 - Overall Total</p>

Nearly all of the instructors indicated that they assign writing (94%, question #2). At the same time, 82% of the instructors rated student writing as weak (57%), very weak (19%), or extremely poor (6%) (question 8). This suggests that simply assigning writing does not necessarily lead to good writing.

Since providing feedback and allowing revision are recommended methods for improving student writing, we were curious to see how many instructors allowed revision (question 7). While the results were not clear cut because many instructors added their own responses, the results indicate that more instructors allow revision than not. We thought fewer instructors would allow revision. This is evidence that, at least among this small sample size of UNLV instructors, some good practices of writing instruction are in place at UNLV. We did not, however, ask instructors to reveal their department affiliation, so we do not know how many of these instructors are already teaching writing in fairly progressive ways, for instance, in freshman composition courses.

The most common number of pages of assigned writing during a semester was 11-20 pages (33%, question 6), followed by 5-10 pages (28%). Instructors reported assigning a range of writing activities (question 5). The most common was reports and papers fewer than 5 pages (60%), short answer exams (52%), and written responses to readings, textbook questions, etc. (40%). Only 27% of the instructors reported using informal writing (journals, freewrites, brainstorming, in-class writing, etc.). This last number could be higher, and contrary to the revision question, indicates that instructors could learn new ways to use writing in the classroom. This could also be said for short answer exams being the most common writing assignment.

Most of the instructors surveyed (76%, question 9) supported more writing requirements in the major. Most instructors (72%, question 10) supported more writing requirements as electives and in general education courses (82%, question 11).

Instructors were more mixed about whether or not they favor requiring students to pass a writing proficiency exam to graduate. Of the respondents, 55% were in favor of such a requirement, and 22% were opposed to it.

In addition to close-ended questions, we asked respondents if they had any comments or questions about undergraduate writing. Below are some selected comments that mirror similar responses by other respondents:

- *“In my opinion, the biggest weakness that undergraduates at UNLV demonstrate is in inadequate citing or blatant plagiarism.”*
- *“One of the challenges with undergraduate education here is the large number of international students who speak/write English as a second language. I think we need to require the same level of writing from them, although it may be more difficult for them. Allowing them to write at a lower level of competency pulls down the quality of all students OR results in disproportionate grading criteria.”*
- *“The real issue here is one of grading. I would like to assign more in-depth writing assignments, but without the help of assistants or graders, I only have time to go through 50 papers per semester once, if at all, if I'm ever going to get tenure. Therefore, I've found that one has to break the work up into small, manageable chunks rather than large writing assignments, despite the fact that the large assignments may be more useful for student development. The question becomes, if we want to move towards a writing-intensive curriculum, how can we also address the corollary demands on faculty time that come with it?”*
- *“Many professors in my professional school are not qualified to judge whether or not a student is writing well.”*
- *“I believe critical thinking, writing, and reading to be essential to undergraduate education. However, pressure to increase class size makes it harder and harder to teach these skills. Large classes (50-100 at the 100-level, up to 40 at the 400-level) are at odds with UNLV's stated mission of offering quality undergraduate education. Despite my commitment to writing in the classroom, I would not be willing to teach writing intensive" courses unless the added time and effort required was rewarded during the annual evaluation.”*
- *“Our institution must recognize that the population from which we draw the majority of our students (CCSD) does not adequately prepare students for rigorous challenges to writing and other forms of communication. Not only should a sophomore-level writing proficiency examination be required, but also careful placement and remediation. Far too often I encounter students who need remedial tutoring in communication but believe, because of*

their marks in high school, that they deserve high grades on their poorly written papers. I do my best to make up for these deficiencies with each class, however it is frustrating that students lack basic skills. This, of course, is a generalization. There are some outstanding students who produce work that is a joy to read. They are a vast minority.”

- *“I have participated in the LINKS program and I really do believe that writing across the curriculum is very important at any level of education. What we need at UNLV is a writing center for each College!”*
- *“I would like to use online programs that would help me grade papers better - i.e., ability to insert comments of commonly seen errors - do you have recommendations?”*
- *“Students who are entering the nursing program need to be taught APA not MLA in their prerequisite courses. Scientific writing is very different from creative writing. Students coming into the nursing program have no idea what scientific writing is and how it is different from creative writing.”*
- *“I support requiring more writing, but I think the writing should be related to the discipline. I don't think we should make every course writing intensive, but I do think our undergrads need some serious help with their writing skills. I especially think we need several courses to cover email etiquette.”*
- *“It is a huge problem, on many levels. The very weak skills students bring to my courses in the first place (for the most part) make it so, primarily. I have still not figured out how to teach writing to students in upper-division courses when they come to me seemingly unaware even of the basics. I am particularly flummoxed by the apparent fact that, each time I teach such a course, it seems like the first time students have ever heard of, for example, thesis construction, quotation style, integration of quotation, argument development, and so on and so on. Clearly something else is going on here, but I cannot identify what it is. I hope you can: are they really not learning these things elsewhere or merely not retaining it? why why why?”*
- *“...the biggest issue, I believe, is the variability of the writing skills of undergrads. Some are very good, others seem to be writing at an 8th grade level. That is the whole reason I was inspired to answer this survey.”*
- *“To teach students to write, the instructor MUST give detailed instructions, detailed feedback, and require multiple drafts. This is time-intensive. Courses designated as writing-intensive MUST provide more support to the instructors. This could be in the form of much smaller class sizes (max 15 students), counting the courses more under workload policies (count them as 6 credits rather than 3), providing much greater GA support. These all cost a lot of money and time. Our students desperately need more instruction and feedback on their writing, but I am opposed to the creation of writing-intensive courses if adequate resources cannot be provided to the instructors.”*

These responses were typical of the comments provided by faculty and staff who completed the survey. As the comments above indicate, the instructors who responded generally believe strong writing skills are important and are committed to assigning writing in the classroom. However, they experience many challenges to assigning writing, including

- a range of student ability
- questions about minimum expectations of student writing ability, such as when students should be expected to know discipline-specific conventions, e.g., APA format
- an apparent lack of student attention to basics of grammar and mechanics
- questions about how to handle ESL students
- concerns about plagiarism
- lack of confidence in the ability to evaluate student writing
- pressure to teach increasingly larger sections
- a belief that assigning writing is not supported or valued in the current reward system

The issues (and frustrations) are common for instructors who attempt to assign writing. Comments such as the ones noted above provide strong support for a WAC program that would provide instructors with the knowledge, resources, and rewards to use writing more effectively in the classroom.

The weaknesses of this survey are the 8% response rate and potential for sampling bias.

The Writing Center

Dr. Patrice Hollrah, Writing Center Director and member of the WAC Steering Committee, provided the following information about the writing center:

The Writing Center is a unit of the College of Liberal Arts, reporting to the Department of English, and students from any discipline are encouraged to use the services of the Center. The Writing Center offers free assistance with any project that requires writing to all graduate and undergraduate UNLV students. Consultants are also available to work with staff and faculty on a space-available basis, and workshops on various writing topics are offered each semester. Writing Center consultants are primarily English department graduate students and instructors, though there may also be some undergraduate peer tutors and graduate students from other colleges.

The Writing Center provides a friendly, constructive, student-centered environment in which writers may work to develop confidence in their own writing skills and develop strategies to increase the effectiveness of their own writing techniques; thus, our emphasis is on the writing process rather than on the written product. Consultants work with students individually (or in small groups as appropriate), usually on writing tasks assigned by an instructor. Consultants are trained to help students by asking open-ended questions that encourage students to think about their assignments/topics in new ways. In short, they act as second readers of texts. Consultants

offer more direct guidance only as appropriate (such as helping non-native speakers of English with issues in grammar and usage).

Since it views writing as a process, the Writing Center staff discourage the idea that the Writing Center is a “trauma center” or “fix-it shop” for “bad” writing. The staff strives to work with students over time, pointing out patterns of error as well as working together to improve issues such as audience awareness, coherence, organization, topic development, sentence structure, and diction.

Writing Center staff will neither supply students with the words to express their ideas nor give them the ideas to express. Instead, we ask students the questions that they may not think to ask themselves, thereby endeavoring to help students find appropriate methods of expression and guide them in finding their own methods of articulating these ideas. The long-term goal is that of positive “planned obsolescence”: the hope is that students ultimately will be able to take the skills they have learned in the Writing Center and apply them to their own unsupervised writing.

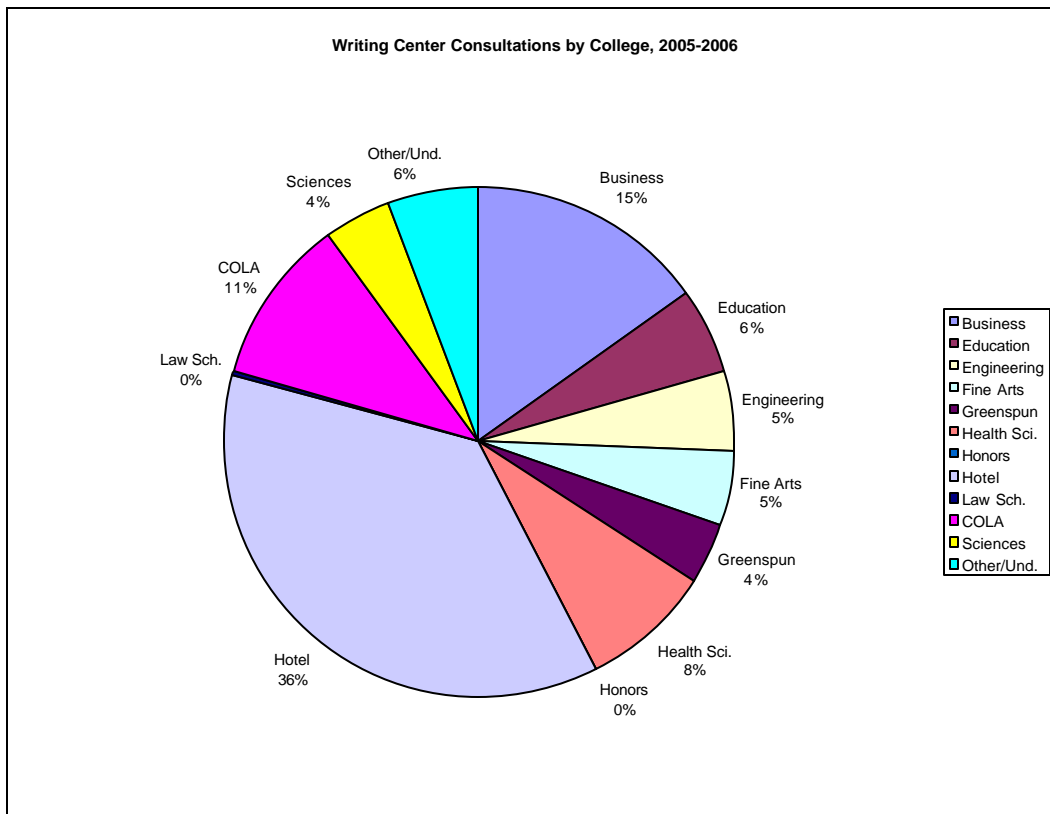
The College of Liberal Arts provides the budget for operations and the wages of several consultants, and the Department of English assigns graduate teaching assistants (GTA’s) to the Writing Center. The Nevada System of Higher Education Work Service Program, or NSHE Work Service Program, funds one position. The College of Hotel Administration reimburses the Writing Center for the salary of one writing consultant, and the Office of Information Technology funds the receptionists who monitor the computer lab.

With the current operations budget and the number of GTA’s changing on a semester-to-semester basis, the staffing is not consistent; therefore, the ability to serve the UNLV student population changes accordingly. When there is adequate staff, nobody is turned away. When there are fewer consultants, students are turned away during peak volume periods—mid-term and end-of-the-semester. For example, in Fall 2002 there were approximately 735 available appointments; 27 students were turned away for lack of appointments, and 95 students were wait-listed for cancellations. In Spring 2003 there were approximately 1,257 available appointments; only 11 students were turned away for lack of appointments, and 3 students were wait-listed for cancellations.

Item	Fall 2002	Spring 2003	+/- Difference
Available Appointments	735	1,257	71% increase
Turn-Aways	27	11	59% decrease
Wait-Listed	95	3	97% decrease

The 2005-2006 academic year saw 2,849 total visits to the main Writing Center, of which 967 were for composition courses. The remaining visits, 67%, were for courses other than composition, which include assignments in Hotel Administration, Business, and all other courses.

The following chart indicates the percentage of visits from various colleges. These figures do not represent all writing assigned for undergraduates but only those students who used the services of the Writing Center.



The Writing Center would need more consistent support if a WAC program were implemented because there is the potential for more students to use the Writing Center.

The Teaching and Learning Center

The Teaching and Learning Center (TLC), Directed by Leora Baron, offers an array of workshops in as many as 17 different programs on a regular basis. We identified several TLC workshops with direct or related connections to writing/communication:

- Writing Assignments Across the Disciplines
- Plagiarism — Deterring It
- Research Assignment Design
- Case Studies—Create Your Own
- Are They Learning?— Classroom Assessment Techniques
- Service Learning

Some records on past participants of these workshops are available, but it is difficult to estimate how effective such workshops have been at improving writing instruction or writing ability.

When evaluating the ability of the TLC to contribute to a WAC program, one of its key strengths is its facilities. The TLC is centrally located on campus in the well-appointed Lied Library. There is ample space and accommodations for faculty workshops.

The TLC has also developed an effective system for advertising, recruiting, and registering faculty into its workshops. The TLC uses e-mail alerts and online sign-up forms, in addition to print flyers and mailings, to alert faculty and staff to upcoming workshops.

One of the shortcomings of the TLC is that it does not have an adequate budget to provide stipends and course development grants. It barely has a budget to provide adequate catering for faculty development workshops, which is considered a simple yet effective way to attract faculty and staff desiring professional development. TLC also does not have an adequate budget to bring in outside experts who could inform the campus community on cutting-edge innovations in pedagogy. Nor does it have a budget to compensate insiders who could share their experience with the rest of the teaching community.

Another shortcoming, which is more of an unavoidable reality, is that like similar programs in higher education that focus on teaching and pedagogy, the TLC's status is low compared to research-oriented programs (arguably reflected in its budget, as well).

If the resources allocated to the Teaching and Learning Center (or the Writing Center) is a gauge for how important supporting the undergraduate mission is to UNLV, there stands room for improvement.

Conclusions

The most important needs indicated by the results of our inquiry into the state of undergraduate writing at UNLV are in the areas of faculty development, faculty support, and program assessment. Faculty are willing to assign writing, but need help using writing more effectively. Faculty have many questions about how to deal with issues of uneven student ability, grammar and mechanics, plagiarism, ESL writing, and technology. Faculty workshops could address this need. Faculty feel that large class sizes and the pressure to produce research mitigate against their inclinations to incorporate more labor-intensive writing assignments. Stipends and grants for attending workshops, developing writing intensive courses, and engaging in classroom-based research projects would address this need.

Data from the department chair's survey and from department assessment reports indicate that departments could benefit from more help implementing valid and reliable methods of writing assessment. A WAC program that focuses on working with departments to develop more

effective plans for integrating and assessing writing would address this need. Such assistance is usually provided in the form of consultations with a knowledgeable WAC director and consultants, stipends for assessment and curriculum planning workshops (including bringing in outside speakers), and larger soft-money grants to support the development of new curricula. For example, Miami of Ohio's Center for Writing Excellence offers two \$5,000 grants annually to assist departments wishing to integrate writing into their curriculum.

Our inquiry into undergraduate writing also demonstrates that there are resources already in place that would be necessary for sustaining a WAC program, namely the Writing Center and the Teaching and Learning Center. These centers have established budgets, usable facilities, and knowledgeable and cooperative leaders. Both directors indicate, however, that additional resources would be needed if their missions were to expand to include supporting a WAC program.

The results are less clear about whether or not a writing intensive requirement is needed. It seems faculty are assigning writing and it seems students are generally writing at levels equal to their peers at other institutions (at both the freshman and senior levels). Yet the perception among faculty and employers that students "can't write" persists. Perhaps more importantly, faculty are concerned about how increasing class sizes and the pressure to publish mitigate against the desire to assign writing in undergraduate classes. A WI requirement that would in effect mandate small class sizes, provide faculty development stipends and grants, and increase student supports including TAs/tutors would address these concerns.

What should be clear from the literature review (Section 3) and our research on the state of undergraduate writing here at UNLV (this section), additional resources must be devoted to enhancing writing instruction if improvements in student writing abilities are to be realized.

5. Recommendations

After a period of study that included several committee meetings, an all-day planning retreat, a study of the state of UNLV undergraduate writing, and examination of model programs and existing scholarship, the WAC Steering Committee recommends the following:

1. Create a WAC program with a mission and objectives that go beyond the goals of freshman composition.
2. Seek approval of a 1-course “Writing Intensive” (WI) requirement from the university community through the faculty senate and individual departments.
3. Create a center or institute that has sufficient resources to assist faculty and departmental efforts to incorporate writing-based pedagogies.
4. Refine the general education learning outcomes to reflect a broadened conception of writing skills.
5. Move the Writing Center into the WAC Program.
6. Further Explore a writing proficiency requirement.

Recommendation 1: Create a WAC Program with a Mission and Objectives that Go Beyond the Goals of Freshman Composition

As the literature review in section 3 showed, writing across the curriculum is perhaps the most effective solution to the shortcomings inherent in the freshman composition-only model of writing instruction. Therefore, based on current theory and practice, we recommend that UNLV initiate a WAC Program with the following mission and objectives:

Mission

UNLV’s Writing Across the Curriculum Program will improve students’ writing abilities through the support and enhancement of university-wide instruction, so that graduates of UNLV will distinguish themselves as literate participants in their professions and society.

Objectives

The objectives of UNLV’s Writing Across the Curriculum Program are as follows:

- Reinforce and build upon the general academic literacy acquired in first-year composition and expected of all college-level writers.
- Integrate writing as a tool for inquiry, reflection, and understanding in as many courses as practicable, especially in general education courses.
- Enhance the acquisition of the discipline-specific literacy expected of students writing in particular majors.
- Provide faculty with the training and support they need to achieve objectives 1, 2, and 3.
- Secure from department, college, and university administration the material resources and professional support necessary to achieve objectives 1, 2, 3, and 4.

The first objective recognizes that students need additional reinforcement and practice to maintain and further develop their general academic literacy. The second objective recognizes that writing can be used as a tool for active learning and that informal writing will further develop writing ability and lead to better formal written products. The third objective recognizes that students need formal instruction in discipline-specific forms of writing and that the major is the place for such instruction. The fourth objective recognizes that all faculty are responsible for developing writing ability but that they need training and support to use writing more effectively in their teaching. The final objective recognizes that strong administrative support is necessary for the success of any WAC program. The administration must support the WAC program with an adequate budget for faculty development workshops, faculty classroom assistance, student tutoring, etc. The administration must also support adequate instructor-to-student ratios and reward the extra effort that faculty put into teaching writing intensive courses.

Recommendation 2: Seek approval of a one-course “Writing Intensive” (WI) requirement from the university community through the faculty senate and individual departments

The Committee recommends that the university community adopt a WI requirement, the details of which will be explained below. The WAC Steering Committee cautions, however, that adopting a WI requirement is a long-term commitment that requires significant resources and has some potential drawbacks. The university must be willing to support WI courses if such a proposal is to go forward.

As demonstrated by information collected in Part 4 of this report, most employers, faculty, and staff believe strong writing skills are important. However, the evidence that UNLV undergraduate writing is somehow deficient is mixed. Furthermore, the WAC Committee was unable to ascertain completely what the will of all faculty and departments is on this matter. Most of the members of the committee and participants at the October 6, 2006 WAC retreat were reluctant to go beyond recommending one (1) writing intensive course as a requirement. The Committee therefore suggests the members of the faculty senate read this report, consider this

proposal, and take this discussion back to the colleges and departments for consideration, and eventually, a formal vote.

Common Features of WI Requirements

The Committee studied the number of courses required, goals, criteria for WI courses, and approval processes for the following schools that have well-known and representative WAC programs with WI requirements:

1. U of Hawaii <http://mwp01.mwp.hawaii.edu/>
1. George Mason University <http://wac.gmu.edu/wi/wirequirement.html>
2. U of Missouri Columbia <http://cwp.missouri.edu/index.htm>
3. U of Kentucky <http://www.uky.edu/UGS/WritingInitiative/>
4. U of Minnesota <http://writing.umn.edu/tww/policy/index.htm>
5. George Washington <http://www.gwu.edu/%7Euwp/wid/wid-about.htm>
6. Duke University <http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wid/>

(See “[WI Course Comparison](#)” for more information on each program)

Based on a review of the above programs, we determined the following:

- The WI requirement ranges from 1-5 courses, with an average of 2 courses as a requirement: Hawaii (5), George Mason (1), Missouri (2), Kentucky (1), Minnesota (4), George Washington (2), Duke (2)
- The main criteria/standards for WI courses range, but generally includes the following
 1. establish a minimum page range (the average was 4,000 words or 16 double-spaced pages)
 2. require both informal and formal writing
 3. specify that assignments include revision based on instructor feedback
 4. make writing assignments amount to a significant portion of the final grade
 5. establish class size caps
- Depending on how one defines informal writing, either all of the schools or four out of the seven schools incorporate both formal and informal writing in their goals and criteria. Informal writing is “process” writing including in-class writing, journals, freewrites, etc. It is called informal writing because it is not graded for mechanics, though satisfactory completion should count toward a grade. For the three schools that do not explicitly refer to informal writing, George Washington requires that writing be used for “engaging in research and developing analytical skills.” Duke University doesn’t stress informal writing, but rather students learning how to “reflect on and improve their work as writers.” Kentucky mentions that writing is a process with “varying degrees” of focus on “generating” ideas.
- All schools require some form of “WI certification,” i.e., that an instructor or department get approval for a WI course beforehand based on a proposal outlining how the course

meets WI standards.

- Most schools allow both individual instructors and departments to apply for “WI status.” An individual instructor approved to teach a WI course would mean only that instructor’s section would be WI. But a department could request WI designation for all sections of a course as well.
- All schools incorporate some “centralized” body or committee that reviews and approves WI course proposals. Hawaii decentralizes authority for department proposals, but requires that a department designate a faculty member in the department to serve as the “WI course supervisor.”
- Most of these committees are tied to the school’s faculty senate. The University of Missouri apparently created a new faculty senate committee to monitor WI courses. Hawaii uses a “faculty board” that apparently reports to its general education committee. The exceptions appear to be George Washington, which has an “Advisory Council” located in the Provost’s Office, and Duke University, where its WI program is limited to its liberal arts college.

As was discussed in Part 1 of this report, similar information on typical WI requirements and representative programs was presented at the October 6, 2006 WAC retreat. The participants at that workshop expressed an interest in adopting a WI requirement but that requirements should be kept to a minimum and gradually phased in. Therefore, the WAC Steering Committee recommends the following:

All departments require their students to complete one (1) upper-division course in the major designated as “writing intensive.”

The efficacy of this requirement should be assessed over time and the issue of whether or not more WI courses should be added to the requirement should be revisited in a reasonable timeframe.

Guidelines for Instructors and Administrators

To ensure that student writing improves and that instructors receive the proper support they need, these courses should meet certain guidelines. These guidelines need to be flexible enough to preserve instructor and department autonomy at the same time they encourage minimum university-wide standards based on practices shown to lead to improvements in student writing and more rewarding experiences for teachers who assign writing. Assigning writing adds work but it should not be an onerous task. The following guidelines will help instructors assign writing in more effective and efficient ways and help administrators plan successful WI courses:

Guidelines for Instructors

- **Courses designated as writing intensive should have a substantial amount of formal and informal writing.** This can be accomplished many ways, including the following:
 - Agree to a minimum page range that is acceptable to the department; a range of 3,500 to 5,000 words or 14-20 double-spaced pages is recommended.
 - Make writing assignments count toward a significant percentage of the final grade
 - Spread the minimum page total across several assignments.
 - Divide assignments into stages, including brainstorming, planning, researching, drafting, revising, and editing.
 - Incorporate more informal in- and out-of-class writing activities, such as journals, freewrites, peer evaluations, one-minute papers, etc.
 - Incorporate more discipline-specific genres of writing (for courses in the major).

- **Courses designated as writing intensive should include clear instruction on the writing assignments of the course.** This can be accomplished many ways, including the following:
 - Specify in the syllabus the number, nature, and weight of writing assignments.
 - Distribute detailed information to students about each writing assignment that covers purpose, audience, format, length, and style.
 - Devote time in class to discussing writing assignments, including discussing the assignment and strategies for completing the assignment, brainstorming topics, reviewing examples/samples, brainstorming and drafting exercises, and conducting peer review.

- **Courses designated as writing intensive should provide students with ample feedback on their writing.** This can be accomplished many ways, including the following:
 - Comment on student drafts prior to grading a final version.
 - Hold conferences with students to discuss their writing.
 - Discuss strong/weak samples with the whole class (samples can be from current or previous semesters)
 - Incorporate peer review sessions with clear guidelines/rubrics/evaluation criteria so students get substantive feedback from peers.
 - Allow students to revise at least one formal writing assignment.

Guidelines for Administrators

- **Courses designated writing intensive should maintain an instructor-to-student ratio low enough to allow for an appropriate amount of interaction between instructor and individual students on the writing assignments.**
 - No more than 20 students per instructor is recommended.
 - Courses designated writing intensive should be taught by a faculty member.
 - In cases where it is impracticable to have a faculty member teach a course designated as writing intensive, such a courses can be taught by TAs, GAs, and/or PTIs but it should be *under the supervision of a faculty member*.

- Courses that involve TAs, GAs, and/or PTIs under the supervision of a faculty member can be larger than 20 students, but the 20:1 student-to-instructor ratio should be maintained.
- **Courses designated as writing intensive should be taught by someone with experience or training in WAC-based pedagogy.**
 - Instructors of record for writing intensive courses should be familiar with ways to use formal and informal writing effectively in the course, ways to design writing assignments, and ways to effectively comment on student writing
- **Courses designated as writing intensive should be approved by department curriculum committees and, subsequently, by an extra-departmental committee associated with the Faculty Senate.**
 - Courses designated as writing intensive should meet all of the guidelines for instructors and administrators
 - Courses designated as writing intensive should add ENG 101 and ENG 102 as a prerequisite
 - Courses designated as writing intensive should be indicated in the student schedule of classes (with an abbreviation system to be determined) and, when possible, indicated in the undergraduate catalog. Individual departments will have to decide if they want to designate particular courses as writing intensive (i.e., all sections will be writing intensive) or particular sections of courses as writing intensive (i.e., only some sections will be writing intensive). In cases of the latter, a catalog designation may not always be possible.

Following these guidelines will not only maintain the integrity of courses designated as “writing intensive,” but will also encourage consistency across all departments. Furthermore, the Committee hopes that institutionalizing a WI requirement with the aforementioned guidelines will help create a “culture of writing” at UNLV where students learn that writing well requires constant practice and good writerly habits, where instructors understand that what counts as “good writing” varies from discipline to discipline and it is their responsibility to teach students expectations for writing in their field and classroom, and where administrators understand that assigning writing is a time-consuming but necessary part of higher learning that requires adequate student-to-instructor ratios and additional resources if improvements in student writing are truly desired.

Individual departments and their faculty could decide what courses and/or what curricular arrangements would be the best candidates for a writing emphasis. For instance, there is a movement on campus for capstone courses. These courses, which typically require an in-depth research project, are ideally suited for a complimentary emphasis on communication skills. Other courses that are good for adding a writing emphasis could be upper-division seminars that are requirements for students, or popular electives. Other curricular arrangements could be variations on the current [Writing Links](#) program, which would involve attaching a 1-3 credit English course to a content course and having the instructors work together to develop a writing emphasis in the content course that is also enhanced through the additional support of the attached 1-3 credit hour English course.

It is important to note that any “writing intensive” course would still retain its original course objectives, but would add an emphasis on writing. If departments want to develop a specific course that focuses on communication in the discipline, preferably taught by a faculty member in that field, such a course could be developed in consultation with the WAC program. The advantage of this option is that the onus on changing curricular requirements would remain with the individual departments. Such a model thus respects department autonomy.

Support Components and Necessary Resources

As stated in Part 3, WAC is premised on the assumption that the best way to improve undergraduate writing is by (1) providing faculty with the knowledge to use writing more effectively in classroom instruction and (2) supporting faculty’s efforts to incorporate writing-based pedagogy into their teaching. A WI requirement cannot be responsibly adopted without allocating sufficient resources for instructor and student support. The resources that need funding that are not yet in place include the following:

- Stipends for faculty development
- Support for seminar-sized instructional arrangements, ~20:1 student-to-instructor ratios (e.g., upper-division writing intensive classes, low-enrollment capstones, lecture classes with low-enrollment discussion sections, writing intensive low-enrollment freshman seminars)
- Faculty-in-residence “WAC consultant” positions who will be assigned to work with departments and their faculty to refine communication-related outcomes, develop instructional programs, including assessment plans, and assist in instructional delivery and assessment
- Teaching Assistantships for graduate students assigned as “writing fellows” to individual instructors teaching writing-intensive classes
- Funds for undergraduate student “writing fellows.”
- Funds for on-going professional development including conference grants, outside speakers, and faculty development events.
- Funds to support increased demand at the Writing Center
- Grants for discipline-specific communication research

The WI requirement should thus be bolstered with rewards and incentives for faculty participation, including stipends for attending faculty development workshops and stipends for developing writing-intensive courses (similar to the Distance Education model). Faculty teaching writing intensive courses also will need the support of small class sizes, WAC consultants, and curriculum-based peer tutors. Instructors should receive additional support to integrate their research and teaching through research grants and conference travel grants for the production and dissemination of research on discipline-specific communication theory and pedagogy. The tutoring staff of the Writing Center should also be expanded to handle increased demand.

Some extra-departmental committee, likely associated with the Faculty Senate, either as a separate standing committee (as is the case at some schools such as University of Missouri-Columbia) or as a sub-committee of the General Education committee, would have to be formed to review WI course proposals, ensure that WI requirements are being maintained, review

transfer requests, and provide general oversight. Many programs also have employer advisory boards as well.

As our review of department assessment plans indicated, all but a few departments included specific outcomes related to undergraduate communication skills. But most departments were not directly assessing student communication skills. It is safe to say that most departments do not accurately know how well their students are writing. Yet, employers and faculty almost universally complain of poor student writing. The WAC Program would coordinate with the Director of Assessment to work with individual departments to develop assessment plans that would more directly—and thus more reliably and validly—assess student communication skills. The most valid method for assessing student writing is through portfolios. Any efforts to develop portfolio writing assessment could be tied to the current initiative through the Assessment Office to develop portfolio assessment.

Departments that wish to add writing emphases to existing courses should also be assured that enrollments necessary for adequate students-to-instructor interaction, roughly a 20:1 ratio, will be supported. It will be up to individual departments to outline what support they will need to maintain such ratios. They may need more PTIs or GAs. They may even need more faculty. They may decide to have a number of seminar-sized classes, or they may decide to attach writing-intensive discussion sections or Writing Links to large lectures. (It is preferable to have faculty rather than PTIs or GAs teaching such courses.) Regardless of the curricular arrangement that suits each department, the WAC Program should be the conduit through which the Provost's Office supports the small class sizes that national experts agree are conducive to writing instruction.

Advantages

The Committee's faculty and department chair surveys (see Part 4) indicated that people are already assigning writing. We believe that there are many courses that could already, or nearly, qualify as WI intensive courses, according to the criteria we outlined above. Many courses would only need slight modification, which we believe would improve the learning experience for students and teaching satisfaction for instructors. If a WI requirement was adopted, the WAC Committee would work with departments to identify courses that would be good candidates for WI course designation, and to find instructors who would be good candidates to teach such courses.

As the review of literature in Part 3 indicated, the main advantage of the WI curricular requirement is that it institutionalizes WAC in a way that indicates to stakeholders that writing is important and requires more instruction and reinforcement than freshman composition can provide. Adding a curricular requirement also increases its chances for long-term success. If maintained with consistent leadership, proper resources, and strong faculty support, a WI requirement can be effective over time (Miraglia and McLeod, 1997). Another advantage of the WI requirement is that it creates standards that transcend individual departments, which contributes to instructional rigor and consistency.

If the desire is to support WAC (and undergraduate education, in general) by maintaining small class sizes, the WI requirement would be a strong option to choose, for it could explicitly

mandate such courses be capped at a recommended level (or ratio, for larger class sizes can be supported with GAs or PTIs, though this is not the preferred or traditional arrangement).

Disadvantages

The disadvantages associated with a WI requirement are as follows:

1. **It creates a requirement “on the books” that must be maintained over time** : As White (1990) argued, many institutions that adopted WI courses have let them gradually erode into a sham requirement without any support or consistency.
2. **It creates a requirement that involves extra-departmental oversight** : White (1990) argued that without proper faculty development and sufficient program oversight, WI courses can quickly devolve into traditional “term paper only” courses that do not include the practices shown to improve student writing.
3. **It requires class sizes small enough for reasonable paper loads, ~20 students**: Another problem cited by White (1990) with WI requirements is the gradual erosion of enrollment caps to the point where faculty can no longer include substantive writing assignments.
4. **Some departments could claim to have insufficient faculty-to-student ratios to support writing-intensive instruction**: We heard this from representatives of the Psychology and Hotel Administration departments, for example. The full impact on such departments, or if other departments would be similarly affected, has not been completely ascertained.
5. **Some students eventually could come to resist writing assignments in courses that are not designated as writing intensive**: A WI requirement can actually work against the goals of increasing the use of writing in all courses if students (and instructors) begin to oversimplify the distinctions between courses designated with a “WI” label and courses not labeled as “WI.”
6. **Whether or not a WI requirement counts as a general education requirement or as a requirement “in the major” is ambiguous** . The Committee never received a clear answer to this sticky question. It appears according to NSHE articulation policy that “general education” consists of the first two years of coursework that students can satisfy and transfer to any institution, and thus, WI requirements would have to be reserved for upper-division courses. But upper-division courses tend to be the territory of “the major.” NSHE schools have some general education idiosyncrasies, such as Reno’s capstone requirement and Nevada State College’s 2-credit “study and technology skills” requirement.
7. **It creates additional articulation and transfer considerations** . We heard from advisors that a WI requirement would be one more burden on their resources. The same extra-departmental committee that reviews WI course proposals would also have to review

transfer requests.

8. **Some possibly innovative solutions to integrating writing into the curriculum might be stifled, unless alternatives and substitutions are eventually approved:** According to Miraglia and McLeod (1997), the most enduring WAC programs possessed a range of components and requirements. Such diversity at these institutions is likely as much a result of gradual evolution as intentional design. A good WAC program should allow for innovative curricular arrangements.

In summary, for a WI requirement to work, it is essential that the majority of faculty understand that

1. It is the entire faculty (not just faculty in the English department) who will be responsible for designing and teaching WI courses
2. There are methods to create more effective, efficient (and rewarding) writing assignments and that faculty must make an effort to learn these methods
3. Standards external to the department must be maintained in all WI courses.
4. Instructor-to-student ratios conducive to writing instruction must be maintained
5. Additional resources must be allocated to support instructors and students in writing intensive courses
6. These resources will be required annually, for the duration of the requirement
7. WI courses are not the only classes where writing can and should be assigned; however, WI courses and a WI requirement commit the institution, students, and faculty to a minimum amount of supported writing instruction beyond the freshman composition requirement.

If the faculty and administrators are willing to accept these premises, then the WAC Committee strongly recommends the university adopt a WI requirement.

Implementation

If the university elects to adopt a WI requirement, the actual requirement should not be mandated for several years to give time to develop enough WI courses. Depending on the budget, it would take several years to develop enough WI courses for every department.

For instance, the University of Missouri-Columbia, an institution similar in size and mission to UNLV, which also has a nationally recognized WAC program, passed a 1-course WI requirement in 1988 and offered a total of 75 WI courses the following year. However, Missouri-Columbia spent three years prior to the adoption of the requirement developing courses, initially starting with 5 courses in '85-'86 and building to 46 courses in '87-'88, the year prior to the formal adoption of the requirement (see <http://cwp.missouri.edu/cwpinfo/programbook.htm>).

Missouri-Columbia's program has grown to the point where it offered 270 WI courses in 2005-2006. However, Missouri-Columbia adopted a 2-course WI requirement in 1993. So, to meet a 1-course requirement, UNLV would need to offer only half this number, or approximately 140 sections annually. **If 15 faculty were trained each semester, it would take 4.6 years to train enough faculty to offer 140 sections each year.**

Therefore, assuming the university elects to go forward with the WI requirement by the end of the 2007-2008 year, and begins offering faculty development workshops and piloting WI courses in 2008-2010, it seems feasible to propose **the 1-course requirement be formally added to the fall 2012-spring 2014 calendar.**

WI courses can be assessed by the following means:

- WI-related questions can be added to student course evaluation forms
- Faculty questionnaires administered at the end of the semester (e.g., St. Ambrose Post-Semester Assessment questionnaire: <http://web.sau.edu/Wac/Post-SemesterWICourseAssessment%20Fall%2006.htm>)
- Samples of student writing randomly collected and evaluated by raters external to the course of origin
- Proficiency requirement results (if mandated, including writing samples from WI courses and/or timed-essay exams)
- Periodic external program evaluation
- WAC program/TLC will sponsor classroom studies of teaching, learning, writing

Some of these assessments may require additional resources as well.

Recommendation 3: Create a center or institute that has sufficient resources to assist individual faculty and departmental efforts to incorporate writing-based pedagogies

Experts on WAC suggest that the best way to improve undergraduate writing and to support general and discipline-specific writing instruction is to implement WAC in a flexible, adaptive system that will (1) tie into and augment individual departments' existing assessment efforts, (2) give incentives to departments to develop new curricula, and (3) reward individual faculty and staff for participation.

To achieve these ends, the Committee recommends that UNLV house its WAC program in a center or institute. Such centers exist at other schools noted for their WAC programs, including North Carolina State, Clemson, Miami of Ohio, and Maryland. Housing the WAC program in a center or institute assumes that faculty and departments will seek out resources for improving undergraduate communication skills provided the resources are put in place. The resources are the same as mentioned in the discussion of the WI requirement option. Primarily what is needed is incentives and rewards for faculty participation, including stipends for attending faculty development workshops and grants for developing writing-intensive courses (similar to our own Distance Education model).

Faculty teaching writing intensive courses will also need the support of small class sizes, WAC consultants, and curriculum-based peer tutors. Instructors should receive additional support to integrate their teaching with their research through grants and conference travel grants for the

production and dissemination of research on discipline-specific communication theory and pedagogy. The tutoring staff of the Writing Center should also be expanded to handle increased demand.

This recommendation entails running the WAC program as a hybrid between the volunteer-based Teaching and Learning Center and the incentive-based Distance Education program. Once the funds are put in place, individual instructors and departments could apply for any and all of the aforementioned resources. The WAC Program Director, with the assistance of a small staff, would work with individual faculty to introduce WAC theory and practice and work with individual departments to develop plans for improving undergraduate student communication skills by examining current practices with an eye toward enhancing instruction within existing curricular frameworks.

Creating a Center or Institute for “Professional Communication” (Clemson) or “Writing Excellence” (Miami of Ohio) has the benefit of putting a more public face on the WAC initiative. These centers also incorporate an outreach mission, providing workshops, training, and consulting. Such centers also provide more concrete “naming” opportunities, in terms of external gifts and donations.

Such centers also promote research on communication across the disciplines and in the professions by facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration and providing incentives in the form of research grants.

Such a Center or Institute would be as large as its budget allows. This could be an advantage initially, as the budget could be kept reasonably small. This could be a disadvantage as the program grows, if there is more demand, or if the programs needs increased funding over time. If funds run out or demand is high, departments and colleges could be asked to match funds or find ways to fund their own initiatives. Outside funding gifts could also be sought.

Budget

The WAC program’s main budget expenses would be for faculty development (see Table 1, item #1 on page 57). The backbone of any WAC program is the faculty development seminar, which is typically held twice a year, for 3-4 days per workshop. We recommend emulating Miami of Ohio, which uses an “account” system for workshop stipends, whereby faculty are given a credit toward education-related expenses. Any money not spent by a certain deadline is absorbed back into the operating budget (item #1.1). Similar to the support given to faculty teaching Distance Education courses, faculty should also receive a course development stipend when teaching a WI course for the first time (item #1.2).

Additional professional development grants should also be available (item #2). Most WAC programs also offer research/travel grants to encourage scholarly dissemination of WAC-related projects (item #2.1). Similar to the “Planning Initiative Grants” of a few years ago, grants should also be made available to departments wishing to further integrate writing into the curriculum (item #2.2). WAC program staff should also have access to professional development funds, to attend conferences to build knowledge and enhance the reputation of UNLV’s WAC program. Such grant funds can grow as internal or external funds become available.

Table 5.1. Budget		
Item	Unit	Total
1. Faculty Development		60,000
1.1. Workshop Stipends (2 workshops/year)	15 faculty/per semester = 15 x \$500* = \$7,500 x 2 = (*for education-related expense account)	15,000
1.2. Course Development Stipend	15 faculty/per semester= 15 x \$1,500 = \$22,500 x 2 =	45,000
2. Professional Development		7,000
2.1. Faculty research award	\$500 x 2 research awards	1,000
2.2. Department award	\$5,000 x 1	5,000
2.3. WAC Director, staff	\$2,000 x 1	2,000
3. Writing Fellows		104,000
3.1. 8 GAs fellows/tutors	8 x 13,000	104,000
4. Workshop Materials and Food		15,100
4.1. Curriculum Materials	\$80 x 15 x 2 = \$2400	2,400
4.2. Workshop Food	\$30 x 15 x 3 x 2 =	11,700
4.3. Brown bag meetings beverage/snacks	\$100 x 5 x 2 =	1,000
5. Flyers, Newsletter, Advertising, Copies		1,000
5.1. Flyers, Copies, Advertising	\$500 x 2 =	1,000
6. Staff		249,200
6.1. Director	100,000	100,000
6.2. Assistant Director	60,000	60,000
6.3. Faculty-in-Residence	45,000	45,000
6.4. Graduate Assistant	13,000	13,000
6.5. Administrative Assistant	30,000	30,000
6.6. Webmaster	\$600/semester	1,200
7. Technology		2,500
7.1. Technology	2,500/year	2,500
8. Writing Links		16,000
8.1. Professional Development Stipends	10-15 \$500-\$1,200 stipends annually	13,500
8.2. Catering Meetings	500 x 4	2,000
8.3. Advertising	250 x 2	500
9. Writing Center		0
9.1. Additional tutors for WI courses	Unknown	--
9.2. Writing Center operating budget	--	--
TOTAL		\$451,300

Many WAC programs provide writing fellows, or curriculum-based peer tutors, as an additional support for faculty (item #3). They assist the faculty with the paperload (not grading, but reviewing drafts, meeting with students, assisting with in-class peer review sessions, etc.), which makes faculty participation easier and more worthwhile. The total demand for these tutors is difficult to estimate. The University of Missouri-Columbia, which has a 2-course requirement and a policy of assigning one GA per 20 students enrolled in a WI course over the first 20, spent over \$670,000 on graduate teaching support in year 2003-2004. (The budget for Missouri-Columbia's program is based on a per department FTE formula of \$110/student after subtracting for first 20 students. In 2003-2004, Missouri-Columbia's WI program served roughly 10,000 students and thus had a budget of over \$1,000,0000 dollars).

We estimate that one GA course assignment could cover 2-3 WI courses a semester (assuming the GA is serving primarily as a course-dedicated tutor and not a grader), which means one GA appointment could support 4-6 WI courses. If the goal is to build out to approximately 140 WI courses annually, that equates to roughly 23 GA lines at a cost of \$299,000. The current budget requests one-third of that figure. As the program grows, the budget may have to be expanded, depending on the efficacy and demand for such writing fellows support. If colleges or departments wish to support WI courses with enrollments over 20 students, they should provide their own GAs, who can be trained in conjunction with the faculty member. If a writing fellows program works, it may reduce the increased demand that a WAC program typically puts on a Writing Center staff. We recommend these writing fellows be “housed” in the Writing Center for administrative purposes.

It is an axiom in WAC: good faculty workshops create a teaching community that extends beyond the 3-4 day experience. An integral part of the workshop experience is adequate curriculum materials and catering/food (item #4). Many WAC programs provide additional funds to host their workshops off-site, but we have not requested such funds.

Good WAC programs also publicize workshops, brown bags, speakers, and other events, as well as circulate additional resources and information via newsletters, so a marketing/printing budget is required (item #5). Some resources could probably be shared with the Teaching and Learning Center, such as the use of its online workshop registration software, and/or the TLC’s marketing budget could be expanded to include WAC-related printing expenses.

Another important aspect of a strong WAC program is a staff that includes knowledgeable and consistent leadership, knowledgeable writing consultants who can meet with faculty and departments, and other support personnel (item #6). The budget should include a Director (item #6.1) who has expertise in writing across the curriculum, and, eventually, an Assistant Director (item #6.2) who also has expertise in WAC. Both directors should be tenure-track faculty (an assistant professor with research interests in writing across the curriculum and professional writing may need to be hired) with backgrounds in writing across the curriculum, writing program administration, writing centers, and professional/technical communication. A two-director system allows for continuity; the assistant director would have insider knowledge of the program, could fill-in for the director, and rotate into the director position, without creating a vacuum of leadership if the director were to resign/retire.

One Faculty-In-Residence appointment (item #6.3) early on would be able to handle both administrative and teaching duties, and would ensure some continuity that usually can not be sustained by revolving GA appointments or even PTI appointments. Eventually, more Faculty-in-Residence lines, preferably with WAC experience and/or experience with interdisciplinary teaching, could be added. These FIRs would act as writing consultants, who would teach links and have course releases for consulting/serving as writing fellows. One initial FIR could also devote some of his or her load to administrative duties as well.

The WAC director should also have an administrative assistant and a graduate/research assistant (item #6.4 and 6.5) to assist with administrative tasks related to the WAC program.

A WAC program should have a good website with lots of information and resources for teachers and students. The Writing Fellows can assist the Director to develop these materials, but a webmaster might need to be hired (item #6.6) to design and maintain the website.

It is not certain if any facilities expenses would be incurred. It is assumed the WAC program would share space with the Teaching and Learning Center for faculty workshops. If a separate center or institute was created, there would likely be space needs. A technology budget should be allocated, regardless (item #7).

The Writing Links budget, which pays instructors an extra stipend to “link” their courses, should be folded into the WAC budget (item #8).

This budget includes an unspecified line for the Writing Center (item #9) because it is unknown the impact a WAC program will have initially have on the Writing Center. More GA lines will likely be needed as the program grows. If a WAC program is established, we recommend aligning the Writing Center’s operating budget with the WAC program, for administrative and pedagogical purposes (see recommendation #5).

In terms of physical space, the center can share space with either the Writing Center or the Teaching and Learning Center. It may make more sense for the faculty-oriented WAC Center to share space with student-oriented Writing Center versus the TLC.

Fundraising

It is recommended the WAC Director also work with the Associate Vice Provost for Academic Programs to secure gifts/endowments from the community to augment any start-up budget provided from the Provost’s Office. Providing a gift to support the WAC initiative is a real opportunity for community members to make an impact in an area that is widely perceived as in need of improvement. The “bar” has recently been set high by institutions such as Miami of Ohio (\$10 million gift), Louisiana State University (\$5 million), and University of Denver (\$4 million).

A gift could pay for increased faculty development and research, more writing consultants (FIRs, PTIs, GAs, undergraduates), operating expenses, and possibly be used to hire an endowed chair in “Rhetoric and Writing Studies” or some similar title (as most of the “big-money” WAC programs have done lately) .

Recommendation 4: Refine the General Education Learning Outcomes to Reflect a Broadened Conception of Writing Skills

To further reinforce the distinction that writing ability includes both general academic literacy and discipline-specific literacy, as well as the ability to convey specialized information to lay audiences, the Committee further recommends that the Assistant Vice Provost for Academic Programs, who assumes responsibility for the General Education Program in fall 2007, work

with the Faculty Senate General Education Committee to revisit the current wording of the writing outcome of the Core Curriculum.

The current outcome reads: “English Composition: Students will demonstrate effective written communication.” This outcome is derivative of freshman composition only and does not indicate the assumption that all departments have responsibility to focus on writing in the majors.

We recommend that a requirement similar to the current Core “technology requirement” be adopted, which requires departments to submit documentation to the Faculty Senate that they are providing a “substantive” technology “experience” appropriate to their major (see <http://www.unlv.edu/committees/gec/Mult-Intl/CourseScope.pdf>).

The basic outcome that students should learn to write effectively should include WAC-oriented writing-to-learn and learning-to-write criteria, as well as a stronger emphasis on basic language proficiency. Such language might resemble the following:

- Acquire general academic literacy, including how to respond to needs of audiences and to different kinds of rhetorical situations, analyze and evaluate reasons and evidence, and construct research-based arguments
- Learn genres and conventions for writing within a particular discipline or profession, as well as how to communicate specialized information to lay audiences
- Use writing as a tool for inquiry, analysis, and understanding
- Demonstrate proficiency in Standard Written English

An expanded writing/communication outcome, placed directly in the Core requirements—or somewhere in the gray area between general education (which is perceived as lower-division only) and individual department autonomy—would function as the “teeth” to the WAC program, motivating and holding individual departments accountable for more emphasis on developing undergraduates’ writing ability, regardless of the WAC model chosen by the faculty (WI requirement or the alternative proposed in recommendation #2).

Recommendation 5: Move the Writing Center into the WAC Program

The Writing Center is currently housed in the College of Liberal Arts, but it ambiguously serves the entire University. As noted in the State of Undergraduate Writing section, the Writing Center suffers from an uneven budget and staffing situation. The Writing Center does receive some funds from colleges that sponsor “satellite” writing centers, namely the Hotel and Engineering. It is also working with the Interim Dean Chris Hudgins to attach a fee to all English 101 sections.

It is not certain if the new fee would allow the Writing Center to hire enough tutors to meet any increased demand a WAC program and/or WI requirement would put on the Writing Center. Because a WAC program increases the demand for student tutoring across the university, the Writing Center should be moved out of the College of Liberal arts and placed either under the WAC Director or directly under the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. This would be especially important if UNLV were to adopt WI requirements.

Some institutions, most notably University of Toledo, “house” the WAC program in the Writing Center. That is, it is conceivable that the budget of the Writing Center could be expanded to include some or all of the expenses outlined in the budget recommendations. It would only be a matter of working out the administrative structure and reporting lines of such an arrangement.

Recommendation 6: Further Explore a Writing Proficiency Requirement

One issue the WAC Steering Committee did not have time to fully explore is the question of a writing proficiency requirement. The General Education Task Force recommended turning the standardized exam used in Freshman Composition for assessment purposes into a “high-stakes” exam that students must achieve a certain score on to pass English 102. By itself, it seems a worthy goal: hold students to a certain standard of writing competence. However, when put in the context a WAC program, the idea of considering student writing at the freshman level as the mark of “proficiency” seems limited, for composition can only, at best, achieve a general level of academic literacy and such a mark does not measure overall development of writing in college or competency writing in the disciplines.

As we noted in Part 4, another shortcoming of the current CAAP exam used by the Freshman Composition program is the questionable validity of using timed essay exams and indirect multiple-choice exams to measure students’ ability to produce researched writing of considerable length. Either the outcomes of ENG 102 would have to be adjusted to suit the assessment, or the assessment would have to be changed, or augmented with other tools. The point is not that the CAAP exam is “bad,” per se; rather that it is but one, limited measure of student writing ability.

Another problem with a freshman writing proficiency requirement is that it would be harder to apply to transfer students.

An alternative to the freshman composition exit-exam assessment is the “graduation” requirement or the “junior-rising requirement” (see Table 5.2 on page 62). A “graduation” writing requirement seems the best choice if the desire is to measure writing development in college. Many schools, most notably the California State system, have a graduation writing requirement that can be passed in many ways depending on the institution, including a timed essay-exam, a grade in an upper-division service courses (taught by English department), or a grade a writing intensive course.

One problem with the graduation writing requirement is that it is difficult to “force” students to take it at the desired point in their academic careers. If students take it too late, what happens when they fail the requirement? If they take it too early, then we are back to not measuring full writing development in college.

Faculty generally desire the reassurance that students are moving into their major courses with certain minimum writing skills. The junior-rising requirement (usually administered between 60-90 credits) is a viable alternative in that it purports to measure writing ability encompassing more than the first year of college and can also catch transfer students. One of the aims of Washington

State’s junior-rising proficiency requirement is “to determine if [student] writing abilities have advanced in ways that can handle the writing demands of upper-division courses and courses in [the student’s] major” (“[Junior Writing Portfolio](#)”).

When	Why	Shortcomings
Placement	Place in-coming students into appropriate freshman composition	-Measures students pre-college -Does not measure college-level “proficiency”
Freshman Composition Exit	Check if students achieved goals of freshman composition	-Can measure only general academic literacy
Junior/Junior-Rising (60-90 credits)	Check if students are ready for major classes	-Mostly measuring only general academic literacy -Hard to get compliance
Graduation* * “Graduation requirement” variously applied to freshman, junior, and senior levels	Verify that students are leaving with adequate skills	-What to do if students aren’t “proficient”? (measuring proficiency, but too late to help the inadequate) -If administered too early, it could not be measuring full writing ability and student skills could decrease

Graduation and junior-rising (and even freshman composition) writing assessments that rely on a single exam or even a grade from a single course are considered problematic, since writing assessment experts agree the best way to measure writing proficiency is by evaluating several documents written in different contexts, some that have been revised (CCCC Committee on Assessment, 2006).

The solution has generally been the use of portfolios that contain samples of student writing selected from actual courses. These are considered the most authentic examples of student writing. The use of portfolios raises concerns about plagiarism, but proponents argue that plagiarism is an issue in any testing situation, that writing assignments based on WAC methods deter plagiarism, and that authentication sheets signed by students and instructors deter plagiarism.

The main shortcoming with portfolios is that that they take more time to evaluate. Reliable, valid, and efficient methods for portfolio evaluation have been developed, however, most notably at Washington State University, which has had a junior-rising writing portfolio requirement in place for several years (Haswell, 2001). Washington State’s Junior-Rising writing requirement consists of a portfolio that includes a timed essay exam (administered locally) as well as three writing samples authenticated by instructors.

The WAC Steering Committee did not have time to fully consider this issue. Our faculty survey showed that instructors were less certain about the efficacy of a writing proficiency requirement and desired more information. This issue deserves more study in light of the desire to develop writing ability, maintain standards, and accurately assess writing development in college.

6. Conclusion

The Writing Across the Curriculum Steering Committee was charged by the Director of General Education and Vice Provost for Academic Affairs to further investigate the feasibility of the General Education Task Force's 2003 recommendations to implement a WAC program.

The WAC Steering Committee met for over a year, reviewed published research on WAC, studied model program, hosted a planning retreat, and collected information about the state of undergraduate writing at UNLV.

The Committee found in its review of research that "writing across the curriculum" (sometimes called "writing in the disciplines" or "communication across the curriculum") refers to an education reform movement and body of writing research that has been employed in higher education since the late 1970s, exists in some form in nearly half of all colleges and universities, and is currently experiencing a re-birth in popularity due to increased literacy demands in the workplace and academic disciplines.

WAC aims to (1) address shortcomings of first-year-only model of writing instruction by making structural and cultural changes, (2) spread writing "across" and "up" the curriculum, and (3) incorporate both writing-to-learn (informal writing as a tool for active learning) and learning-to-write (writing as a mode of professional communication) techniques in classes with writing assignments.

Above all, we found that WAC programs require long-term funding and support to be successful. A WAC program "set adrift in the curriculum" can be worse than no WAC program at all (White, 1990).

Our study of undergraduate writing at UNLV revealed that the few measures we could collect, such as results from the Freshman Composition program's CAAP exam, and results of other standardized tests, such as the GRE and GMAT, suggest the UNLV students write at par with, or marginally below, those at other institutions that take these exams. However, faculty and employers still perceive student writing to be a problem. Furthermore, our surveys suggested that faculty desired more information on how to use writing more effectively. Chairs and faculty expressed concerns that large classes and more emphasis on research were diminishing the use of writing assignments. Our review of department assessment reports indicates that departments could use more help assessing student writing.

Based on these results, the WAC Steering Committee has made a number of recommendations in this report that we believe would encourage faculty to use writing more effectively in their teaching and would help departments to integrate writing more effectively in their curricula. We recommend establishing a WAC program that aims to support writing instruction beyond the first year. This WAC program would include the adoption of a WI requirement of one upper-division course in the major and the creation of an "institute of writing excellence." A WAC

program would work well with both of these components in tandem. For WAC to succeed, however, it requires that faculty be willing to teach writing enhanced courses, that departments be willing to share authority over assessment of these courses and keep enrollments small (~20 students), and that administrators be willing to commit additional resources to faculty development and student support.

The advantages of a WI requirement include that it institutionalizes writing instruction beyond the first-year sequence and in the major. The WI requirement can be used to justify small enrollment caps on WI courses, necessary for instructors to manage the paperload and interact on a one-to-one basis with students about their writing (which leads to deeper learning and higher teacher and student satisfaction). The WI requirement also puts standards in place that contributes to rigor and consistency across departments. Without faculty development resources and smaller class sizes (which can also be maintained with GA support), however, WI courses quickly devolve into sham requirements and another layer of educational bureaucracy.

Any WI requirement wouldn't realistically be able to be put on the books until the 2012-2014 catalog and would require an estimated budget of \$450,000 annually, mainly for faculty development, graduate assistants, and program leadership/staff.

Furthermore, we recommended that an institute or center of writing be created, such as Clemson's "Pearce Center for Professional Communication" or Miami of Ohio's "Center for Writing Excellence." Such a center would provide similar faculty development and department curriculum development support. The WAC mission could thus be expanded to include research, community outreach, and consulting as well, which could further contribute to the perception that UNLV is doing something concrete to graduate strong communicators. The advantage of creating a center or institute is that it could be as large as its budget allows and be a nice "naming opportunity" for a donor, as has been demonstrated at other institutions noted for their WAC programs.

Further recommendations that would help create a "culture of writing" at UNLV would be to refine the writing outcomes to make the institution and individual departments more accountable for writing development beyond the freshman year, to realign the writer center with any WAC program, and to further study the question of whether or not UNLV should adopt some form of a writing proficiency requirement.

The committee presents these recommendations to the faculty so that the institution can make an informed decision about the nature and scope of the form that WAC should take at UNLV.

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