

# A Guide to Creating a Writing Plan for a New Major: Process and Product

## Background

Since 2010 all undergraduate majors have needed a plan for including “significant writing experiences relevant to the major across the entire curriculum” (phrasing from the University Senate approved resolution). Faculty are expected to create and use the writing plan to include both writing instruction and opportunities for students to practice writing under the guidance of instructors who are experts in the major and know the conventions and genres that will be expected of graduates from the major. Writing plans are submitted to the University Writing Committee (the UWC), a Senate committee with representation from every college, to be reviewed and approved if they meet the criteria, explained below.

This guide lays out two ways to approach the *process* of creating a writing plan and outlines the elements of a writing plan *product* to be submitted to the UWC for approval.

## Process versus Product

Creating a writing plan, like any writing task, involves both a *process* and a written *product*. It’s important that faculty do the work of integrating writing into the curriculum in ways that make sense to them, and that means that writing plans almost always go through multiple iterations and might best be thought of as needing to develop in stages over several years. Even when programs create a sound writing plan, there will inevitably be additional ways to improve student writing or the teaching of writing, new kinds of writing that students need to master, and changes in curriculum or students that require adjustments to what has been done in the past. The UWC reviews every program on a three-year rotation, in part to encourage faculty to look closely at what is happening with writing in their courses and make decisions about how best to continue this work.

The document that represents the writing plan to others — the writing plan as *product* — is too often treated as a bureaucratic requirement that needs to be completed so that new majors are held to the same standards as existing majors. The UWC aims to make both the process of integrating writing into the curriculum and the requirement that programs submit their plans for review as meaningful for faculty as possible. The UWC realizes the process of creating a writing plan for a new major is often more difficult if new courses need to be created, old courses need to be modified, or additional faculty need to be hired. No one on the UWC is interested in wasting faculty time, so if what is outlined here does not make sense, we urge you to talk with the Director of University Writing to consider alternatives.

The UWC recognizes that programs are already required to do program assessment, and we aim to help programs integrate their assessment of writing into their program assessment and so eliminate double reporting. We also recognize that programs may have other external accreditations that need to be taken into consideration.

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## Criteria for Evaluating a Writing Plan

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Writing plans submitted to the UWC are evaluated using 5 principles that were established by considering the research that demonstrates the connections between certain writing practices and student improvement in writing. The research also shows that these practices promote deeper engagement in learning and the development of critical thinking skills. In keeping with that research, the UWC defines “writing” broadly to include *all* forms of communication (oral, textual, visual, digital, or multi-modal) and not just formal academic papers.

**The 5 principles\* to be included in writing plans are:** (\* See Appendix A for details.)

1. More than one kind of writing
2. More than one place in the curriculum to practice
3. More than one audience and purpose
4. Feedback and opportunities to revise
5. Assessment for continuing improvement

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## Overview of the process for developing a writing plan

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To develop a writing plan, faculty should:

- **Work together** with those who will teach in the major, discussing and making decisions **collaboratively**;
- **Articulate the learning outcomes** related to communication;
- **Create a curriculum map** that shows how these outcomes are included across the curriculum;
- Consider how to **include feedback and revision**;
- Have individual faculty **create writing assignments** for specific courses and **learn teaching strategies for integrating writing instruction and feedback** into disciplinary courses;
- **Identify a method for assessing student writing** as close to the time of graduation as possible; and
- **Continue improving** both student writing and the teaching of writing in the discipline.

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## Overview of the document to be submitted to the UWC for approval

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- **Provide enough background** to help those outside the major understand the context faculty are working in and the needs of students in this major. Providing background lets the UWC provide feedback that is more appropriate and productive;
- **Explain how the faculty** teaching in this major **are engaged in the process** of integrating writing throughout the curriculum;
- **Demonstrate your commitment to integrating writing across your curriculum and your understanding of the five principles required for a writing plan to be approved.** Identify any existing structures or ways the program will be able to continue to work on writing, ensure that faculty and students are aware of the commitment to focus on writing improvement, and, eventually, develop a way to include writing in regular program assessment; and
- **Describe how far into the process you have gotten so far, and identify the most important next step you will take** and how long you expect that process to take. This next step will serve as the basis for the next iteration of your writing plan document, which the UWC considers an implementation report.

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**Submit the document** to [mmarshall@auburn.edu](mailto:mmarshall@auburn.edu) for review by the UWC, copying all the faculty who are involved in teaching in this proposed major.

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# Integrating Writing Across the Curriculum: The Process

*This section outlines the process of integrating writing across a curriculum.*

## Step 1: Faculty work together

Integrating writing across the curriculum is a process that takes some time and cannot be done well unless faculty work collaboratively. Whether you are starting with existing courses or building your major with all new courses, we assume that the process will take time and evolve as you teach courses and engage with students. We also assume that you will want to integrate the assessment of writing with your other program assessments since every undergraduate major at Auburn is expected to include “significant writing experiences relevant to the discipline” throughout the major.

It is certainly possible to modify the process outlined below. The UWC encourages programs and individual faculty to consult with the Director of University Writing throughout this process. Workshops and other support materials are available from the Office of University Writing and online at [auburn.edu/writing](http://auburn.edu/writing).

### Option 1: Beginning with what you are doing already

If the new major will include existing courses and the same faculty, you might want to begin by creating an inventory of existing writing assignments and collecting some samples of student writing at the end of your program. These documents may be helpful as you move through the process. In 2010, many programs built their writing plans out of such assignment inventories, but they found that as new faculty entered the program or assignments were altered, the writing plan based on this inventory was quickly out of date. We thus encourage you to use the inventory only as a starting point for the rest of the process outlined below.

### Option 2: New courses and new faculty are required

Most new majors require at least some new courses to be developed. Even where courses are already being taught for existing majors, we recommend the following process as ultimately more efficient since it allows for better integration of writing assessment with program assessment and allows faculty and assignments to change over time.

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## Step 2: Articulate writing-related outcomes

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Faculty will need to create student learning outcomes related to writing. At the very least, all majors should have a broad outcome such as: ***“Students graduating from the major will be able to demonstrate effective communication addressing different audiences and using different media and genres.”***

Faculty should consider what “effective communication” means within this major and how they will provide “significant writing experiences relevant to the major.” Some programs end up with multiple writing-related outcomes to represent their expectations, or they create sub-outcomes that can be measured across multiple assignments. No matter what form the final list of outcomes take, the process of defining “effective communication” for the major and creating student learning outcomes will likely require faculty to:

### A. Consider what forms of writing students graduating from this major will need to produce.

***Example: What genres, audiences, purposes, and disciplinary conventions do students need to master\*?***

Note the connection here to two of the principles for Auburn’s writing plans — more than one kind of writing and more than one audience/purpose.

\* See Appendix B for more information.

### B. Consider what skills students need to have in order to manage writing tasks.

***Example: Are there preliminary skills\* students need to have in order to produce these genres?***

For example, students cannot easily synthesize scholarship in the field of study for a literature review if they don’t know how to locate appropriate scholarship and read it with understanding. Practicing the synthesis required in a literature review is a preliminary skill to producing a scholarly article or thesis.

\* See Appendix B for more information.

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## Step 3: Create a curriculum map

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**A curriculum map is a visual representation of where skills or types of writing are taught and practiced across the courses in the major.** Curriculum maps are most useful when they identify required versus elective courses and/or co-curricular experiences (internships, study abroad, undergraduate research, etc.) and when they separate introductory teaching, opportunities for practice, and expected demonstration of mastery.

If you are beginning with an inventory of existing assignments, you will still want to eventually **produce a curriculum map that is not tied to specific assignments. Doing so will give the program and the faculty teaching in it more flexibility without requiring you to recreate a new writing plan each time you change an assignment or a faculty member leaves Auburn.** Remember that a single assignment might be accomplishing multiple outcomes, including ones that are not related to writing.

As faculty work together on a curriculum map, they may discover that they are reinforcing only a small subset of the genres or writing habits they expect students to demonstrate as graduates. A good curriculum map is thus most useful to the faculty in the program both for planning purposes and as a guide to new faculty, but it might also help make the integration of writing across the major clear to students, the UWC members, and other stakeholders.

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## Step 4: Consider teaching strategies that support writing improvement

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Consider the teaching strategies faculty are or could use to support improvements in writing and how they will learn to use those strategies over time. The most important of these is **feedback and revision**, another of the five principles that writing plans need to include. Ideally, feedback and revision occurs in every course, though it might be managed differently. For example, feedback does not always have to come only from the faculty member and need not be given only on a complete draft of the document. Faculty might consider where and how to include peer review, how to offer comments on portions of long assignments that enable students to revise and produce the full assignment, or how to use a well-constructed rubric to provide feedback.

Likewise, **revision doesn't always mean just correcting the draft to make it better**. Students can be asked to **revise for a different audience**, to put the information in a **different format**, to **expand or shorten** the original document. All of these kinds of revision can help students gain flexibility as writers and reinforce critical thinking and mastery of knowledge.

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## Step 5: Create assignments and learn teaching strategies

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While assignments are always subject to revision, having faculty create writing assignments for courses they will be teaching will let all faculty think together about whether the outcomes and curriculum map are sound or need additional revision. This back and forth process is likely to be ongoing. See *Appendix C for available support resources*.

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## Step 6: Identify a method for assessing student writing

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Often a capstone or senior level course requires a complex project that asks students to demonstrate mastery of multiple learning outcomes. But some professional accrediting bodies require programs to assess at multiple levels. **Faculty need to consider all the external forces that require assessment, but they also need to consider what they most need to know in order to make good decisions about their curriculum or their teaching.**

Faculty would be wise to also consider whether and how they might assess the mastery of writing practices (like the ability to revise). Be aware that assessing writing practices will probably require additional materials rather than only a final written product. For example, drafts, comments, or reflections would enable faculty to assess the student's ability to use feedback to revise, but that ability might not be visible in a single finished product.

Finally, faculty need to think through who will do that assessment, how often, and with what kinds of resources. Faculty will probably have to develop a rubric that captures their expectations, test it on a few pieces of student writing similar to what they will be requiring, and revise.

Some programs are asking students to produce an integrative, professional, outward-facing ePortfolio that can help students better represent their learning to future employers or graduate programs, and those ePortfolios can be useful to program assessment as well. However, asking students to do an ePortfolio for the purpose of assessment is rarely productive for anyone. Auburn's ePortfolio Project can offer support to programs interested in including ePortfolios in their curriculum.

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## Step 7: Continued improvement

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Even when all these steps have been successfully completed, faculty will need to regularly consider the assessment data and their own experiences with students to decide on what to do next. The UWC encourages faculty to work on only one element of writing or writing instruction at a time and devise ways of knowing whether their efforts are making a difference. *For examples of elements of improvement you may wish to focus on, see Appendix D.*

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**All programs are reviewed by the UWC every third year.** While the review process changes slightly, the idea is both that programs will get better over time and that they will choose different elements of writing or writing instruction to focus on. The reviews also let the UWC fulfill the second part of its charge, which is to identify common issues across the university and make recommendations to departments, the Senate, and the upper administration that ensure continued improvement in the culture of writing and writing instruction at Auburn.

***Consultations and workshops with the Director of University Writing are available at any stage of the process.***

# Submitting a Writing Plan for UWC Review: The Product

This section outlines the information the UWC looks for in reviewing a writing plan and suggests an approach for submitting a writing plan even if the process of developing the writing plan outlined above is not complete.

## Reality not fiction

Because the UWC recognizes that developing a writing plan takes time, they do not want faculty to spend a lot of time writing a document that pretends to have a fully developed plan when that is not really the case. We believe these steps are do-able even as a new major is proposed, and because the program identifies for itself the work they intend to do in the next year, they set the criteria for future evaluation themselves.

## Part 1: Background and faculty

Provide a brief background of the major so that those outside your program can understand your context. Also briefly tell us about the faculty and structures you have in place to support the faculty teaching in this major and to enable faculty to work together on integrating writing in the curriculum. For a list of questions you may want to consider when developing this section of your writing plan, see Appendix E. Include only what is relevant rather than trying to answer every question.

## Part 2: Understanding of Writing Initiative

Commitment	Process	Visibility
Using examples from current majors in your department or from the courses faculty involved in this major are currently teaching, briefly describe how the 5 principles expected of writing plans are understood by your faculty.	Describe structures that are in place that will be used to undertake the process of integrating writing throughout the curriculum. For example, you might have existing curriculum committees, departmental retreats, professional development programs, or assessment routines already in place that you anticipate using to develop the writing plan process for the new major. Or, you may have decided to create such structures.	You might have mechanisms in place or be planning to develop mechanisms to ensure your plan is visible to students, faculty, and others (see Appendix F for examples). If so, please include them. If not, refer to the list in Appendix F for examples of how to make writing visible that you could use in the future.

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## Part 3: Process to date and plan for next step

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### What's happened so far:

**Document any steps in the process you have already taken.** If you have identified what “effective communication” means, for example, provide the learning outcomes or sub-components. If you have the beginning of a curriculum map, include it. If you are starting with an inventory of existing courses and assignments, include that along with a brief explanation of how you are using this inventory.

### Identify the next step:

However far you've gotten in the process, even if you haven't had the first discussion about writing with the faculty, **identify the step you will take first and the amount of time you will need** before submitting your first implementation report. *Note: An implementation report must be submitted within three years, but shorter time spans are preferable if you are just beginning the process.*

**Provide a description** of what you will do to complete that step, including any faculty development you will undertake. Your **statement of focus\* and timeline** will serve as the basis of your implementation report review, which will be set based on your focus and explanation. In that subsequent implementation report, you will identify the next focus.

\* See Appendix G for examples of Focus Statements.

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## Part 5: Additional Comments

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Add any other comments or description that you think will be helpful to the members of the committee or to your faculty as they collaborate about the issues connected to teaching writing to this major. Do NOT make things up or pad the document. Remember that the UWC knows that this process will take time and would rather read reality than fiction in a writing plan.

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## Logistics

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The UWC meets once a month, August through April. Plans to be considered must be submitted at least 9 days prior to their meetings in order to be considered that month. Meeting dates are listed at <http://wp.auburn.edu/writing/index/writing-plans/> along with examples.

Submit to the Director of University Writing at [mmarshall@auburn.edu](mailto:mmarshall@auburn.edu) who will ensure that it is on the agenda. You can expect feedback from the UWC within a month after the plan appears on its agenda.

If you have any questions about this process, the requirements of the writing plan, or about best practices or possibilities for any of the steps above, contact the Director of University Writing at the email address above or by phoning 844-7475.

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# Appendix A

## Five Principles to be Included in Writing Plans

1. **More than one kind** of writing relevant to the major.

Examples: formal academic research writing, memos, executive summaries, PowerPoint presentations or other oral presentations, posters, documents for a broad public audience, ePortfolios, proposals, grant applications, reflective writing, info graphics, client notes, multi-media projects, etc.

2. More than one **opportunity to practice** those kinds of writing

Writing is not limited to a single course. Preferably, complex skills are introduced, reinforced, and practiced in different courses or assignments. Where necessary, preliminary skills (like identifying appropriate sources) are taught and reinforced before mastery is expected (as in a complete research project).

3. More than one **audience or purpose**

Examples of purpose: to inform, persuade, deliberate, argue, analyze or interpret, apply information to a specific context or case, think through, summarize, synthesize, etc.

Examples of different audiences: other scholars in the field, other academics from different disciplines, a general public, government officials, students, industry stakeholders, clients, etc.

*Note that an audience can be implied and is not always the person/people who actually read the finished product.*

4. **Feedback and opportunities to revise** based on that feedback before receiving the final grade

Though writing often goes through multiple drafts and writers often receive feedback of different kinds throughout the process, *instructors do not have to read and respond to multiple drafts of every assignment.*

Other forms of feedback: peer review; similar assignments repeated over the course of the semester so that comments on the first can be used to improve the second; serial assignments where long projects are submitted in stages and revisions are made as the final, complete project is assembled.

These practices are enhanced when the instructor supplies, or creates with students, a rubric that outlines the criteria for evaluation and the various levels of performance.

Likewise, revision isn't always or only about making a piece of writing better. Types of revision:

Rewriting for a different audience or in a different format (translating a formal research paper into a summary for a general audience or representing a research study as a conference poster)

Condensing (as in an executive summary of a long report)

Expanding (as in a conference presentation becoming a formal article);

5. A plan for **assessing writing and using that assessment** for continued improvement (preferably built into your program assessment)

## Appendix B

### Examples of genres, audiences, purposes, and disciplinary conventions

⇒ **Genres** are the forms of communication students need to master. Common genres include:

- Scholarly articles or papers
- Letters
- Artist statements
- Public service announcements
- Scientific posters
- PowerPoint presentations
- Memos
- Client reports
- Email
- Reflection
- Websites
- Annotated bibliographies
- Executive summaries
- Lab reports or research notes
- News reports or press releases
- Personal statements
- Conference proposals

⇒ **Audiences** refers to not who will actually read the writing students produce, but rather, who the writing is directed towards. Often there is more than one audience. For example, a client report might be intended for those who work with the client in the future, for the referring physician, for the client herself, but perhaps with an eye to the use of such reports in future litigation disputes with insurance providers.

⇒ **Purposes** can also vary. A report can convey information, make a recommendation for action based on an analysis of data, draw conclusions, or offer an interpretation.

⇒ **Disciplinary conventions** vary and students need to be guided as they learn to use specific terms, tools, or formats. Even something apparently as simple as documenting the source of information requires mastery of not only the surface differences between MLA or APA style, but also the kinds of information that count as “common knowledge” and the traditions of quoting (or not) and paraphrasing.

### Examples of writing practices students may need to learn:

- Giving and using feedback
- Managing complex writing tasks
- Proofreading and editing
- Revising for different purposes
- Integrating visual and textual information
- Using writing to learn and being aware of their learning

## Appendix C

### Support Resources

The original writing initiative task force, a precursor of the UWC, recognized that faculty would need support as they worked to embed writing into disciplinary courses, provide writing instruction, give feedback to students, and evaluate the results of these efforts, and so it recommended the creation of the Office of University Writing and the hiring of the Director of University Writing. **There are many programs for students and faculty offered out of this office ([www.auburn.edu/writing](http://www.auburn.edu/writing)) specifically focusing on writing, but support from the Biggio Center for Teaching and Learning and from the Office of Academic Program Assessment may also be helpful.**

## Appendix D

### Elements of improvement might include focusing on:

- **student writing needs** by choosing a particular kind of writing that students don't do as well as they do other types, or intervening to address a common problem like using data to support a conclusion or interpretation, or expanding the range of writing types that students are taught, or increasing the critical thinking or creativity required of such students;
- **teaching writing strategies** by recognizing which practices faculty are not using or not using effectively (*for example, faculty might recognize that they are doing very little with revision and decide to work on improving the way they approach revision; or, they may realize that preliminary skills need more instructions and practice*); or
- **consistency across the major** by considering structures and practices that would improve the climate for teaching writing within the program (*for example, by making the importance of writing more visible to students, by providing more faculty development and recognition of integrating teaching of writing, or by collaborating on research and publications connected to integrating writing or aspects of writing in the major*).

## Appendix E

### Questions that you might consider when providing background include

- What's the purpose of this major?  
What are students with this major likely to do once they graduate?
- How many students are likely to be in this major (or track within an existing major)?  
How many new and existing courses does the major include? Are those courses all in the same department or program or is the major interdisciplinary?
- Do students go through your curriculum in a set order (as with a cohort of students who enter at the same time and are in the same courses each term) or are they choosing their own direction independent from the cohort of students with whom they entered?
- Does the major need to meet standards determined by others like a licensing board or professional certification? If so, briefly explain those external standards.
- Is this major similar to other majors in this department? If so, explain briefly what parts are similar and different.
- If approved, when would students first be able to enroll in this major.

*Note: UWC members do not see the materials and descriptions submitted to the University Curriculum Committee, so feel free to copy and paste as appropriate from those materials.*

### Questions to consider regarding faculty involvement

- Which faculty will be teaching courses in this major?  
Are they all in the same department?  
Have they already been teaching these courses for other majors or do new courses have to be developed?
- How have those faculty been involved in the process of creating the writing plan so far?  
How will they be included in the future?
- How will faculty be made aware of the writing plan and the outcomes you have identified for each course as they are assigned to teach those courses?

*Note: At the minimum, we recommend copying all faculty who will be involved in the major when you submit the writing plan (or implementation reports) to the UWC.*

## Appendix F

### Examples of mechanisms for promoting visibility of your commitment

- A statement for the program's website related to communication skills and their importance
- Statements for course syllabi that identify the communication outcomes that will be taught, reinforced, practiced, or assessed in the course
- Structures to include new faculty in the teaching and assessing of writing
- Routines for having all faculty teaching in the major consider assessment results and talk together about how those results should be used to revise the expectations of "effective communication" or develop new strategies that would improve student writing and writing practices
- A plan for developing one or more of the above or appropriate alternatives

# Appendix G

## Examples of Focus Statements

***For a new track within an existing major requiring no new faculty and few new courses that has identified outcomes, created a curriculum map, and outlined a plan for assessing a capstone project:***

- ⇒ Based on what we already know of students in other tracks of our major, in the next year we will focus on developing assignments to help students more effectively integrate sources into their writing of the senior project. We will begin with a working session for faculty to learn what others are doing, what we might do differently, and how we might build this skill over multiple assignments and multiple courses. We will be able to test some of these modifications in our existing capstone courses. If the major is approved, we would begin offering courses in fall of next year, and students would be able to move into this new major from existing programs. We have existing curriculum and assessment committees that include faculty who will be teaching in the new major. We will be able to submit an implementation report in two years providing baseline data from the assignments we develop and then teach.

***For a new major with existing faculty that requires developing new courses and has only articulated outcomes, but not a curriculum map:***

- ⇒ Since we have articulated the kinds of writing our students need to be able to do upon graduation, in the next year we will work collectively to create a curriculum map. We will work through a small working committee of faculty in the required courses to ensure that components of these outcomes build upon each other and reinforce critical skills. Faculty will begin to develop assignments and meet regularly to peer review those in relation to the outcomes and curriculum map. We will submit an implementation report outlining our progress and identifying our next focus in one year, pending approval of the new major.

***For a new major that requires hiring new faculty and developing a slate of new courses and thus will not begin until those elements are in place:***

- ⇒ Since our major requires creating new courses and hiring new faculty, we will not begin the process of developing a writing plan until the major is approved and hiring new faculty is authorized. We expect the curriculum review and approval process will take one year, and hiring additional faculty will take a second year. We will not begin the process of developing a writing plan until two full years from now and do not expect to offer any courses in the major until year three. We ask that our first implementation report be due three years from today, at which time we will have identified our next steps.