

University Writing Committee Final Report 2012-13

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Attendance Summary: The University Writing Committee (UWC) met 14 times – August 30, September 13 and 28, October 11 and 25, November 8 and 15, January 22, February 12 and 26, March 19, and April 9, 23, and 30. Only one meeting did not have sufficient attendance to establish a quorum.

Summary of Activities: The University Writing Committee (UWC) is charged with regularly reviewing the writing plans and their implementation to identify patterns and make recommendations for the on-going improvement of writing and writing instruction. In 2012-13, the UWC reviewed the first thirty departments based on guided self-assessments provided by the departments. Based on the analysis of the information submitted by departments, the UWC concludes that:

- all reviewed departments have successfully begun implementation of their writing plans, though one department was relying heavily on an external consultant to provide instruction, feedback on student work, and assessment analysis and has been asked to resubmit a writing plan that does not rely on a consultant in place of faculty
- the five principles are being maintained in all departments, though some have adjusted their assessment strategies, or slightly modified the courses where significant writing is included
- many departments have developed rubrics for evaluating writing in conjunction with other curricular objectives, and in several cases, departments have developed rubrics that can be used across multiple courses

Those departments that seem to be making the most progress in implementing the writing initiative share several common features. The UWC decided that the best way to fulfill their charge would be to identify these common features and provide examples of specific practices that other programs may find useful and adaptable to their needs. The UWC sorted their analysis into the following categories and identified specific elements of practices that appear to be successful for both students and faculty. Those categories include:

- achievement of the five writing principles – more than one kind of writing relevant to the discipline, more than one place to practice those kinds of writing, more than one audience and purpose, feedback and opportunities to revise, and an assessment of writing that informs subsequent curricular decisions. Examples of strong practice in this include: provision of authentic writing experiences; creation of new or more effective writing assignments; cultivation of new audiences for student writing; development of effective strategies for providing feedback and opportunities to revise; development of clear and specific learning outcomes related to improving specific aspects of written communication; and, a pervasive culture of attention to writing across the major.
- faculty involvement in the writing plan. Strong practices in this area include having a structure that involves new faculty in the teaching, assessment, and decision making connected to writing; involving multiple faculty across multiple courses in the writing plan; and, developing special events, faculty retreats, policies, and other structures that support faculty who are

- teaching writing and position the department to take collective responsibility for the writing plan.
- effective assessment of writing and use of assessment data to guide curricular and pedagogical decisions. Strong practices in this area include the development of rubrics, especially rubrics that work across multiple courses and establish a language for discussing writing with students that is consistent across the major; establishing a writing committee and a departmental culture that includes discussion of assessment data and decision making; and, focusing assessment on particular aspects of writing that the department has selected as needing improvement.

All of the practices identified as strong practices in each category support writing instruction embedded in disciplinary courses taught by faculty in the disciplines and build on what faculty in the disciplines know about the discourse practices of their field, the curricular goals of their courses, and the ways students learn in their programs. These practices appear to lead to gains in student competency as writers, more engaged learning, and a deeper understanding of the interconnections between writing and thinking valued in all disciplines. Finally, these practices build a culture of writing and writing instruction that can be sustained and developed because they promote meaningful conversations among faculty members and encourage students to synthesize their learning across multiple courses.

The UWC asked the Office of University Writing to develop a way to present other exemplary practices to the Auburn community through on-line resources, features in a regular newsletter for faculty, and/or an event to showcase specific assignments, research focused on writing, or assessment strategies related to writing.

The UWC also created a slightly revised guided self-assessment for the next review cycle (2015-18) that encourages departments to determine a more specific focus for writing improvement so that assessment and instruction can be sustained and deepened.

Issues: Finding a meeting time that works with so many different faculty remains a challenge. The UWC decided to select a standing meeting time of Thursdays, 3-4:30 so that faculty can plan their schedules accordingly. We've also settled on only one meeting per month to make the work load a bit more manageable.

Plans for 2013-14: The major goal for the coming year will be to review the next set of departmental self-reports and begin to develop a rubric that will allow departments to recognize strong and weak practices.