

# Institute Writing Committee

Report to Academic Senate – May, 2018

## Committee

The members of the IWC committee this year were

Andrea Hickerson (CLA) - Co-Chair  
Yossi Nygate (CAST) -- Co-Chair  
Barbara Birkett (CIAS) – Deans’ delegate  
Pamela Conley (NTID)  
Steven W Day (KGCOE)  
Seshavadhani Kumar (COS)  
David Martins (University Writing Program Director)  
Tae Oh (GCCIS)  
Sylvia Perez-Hardy (GCCIS) – ICC representative  
Charon Sattler-LeBlanc (Academic Support Center Director)  
Shawn Sturgeon (SCB)  
Joshua Thorson (CIAS)  
Nancy Valentage (CHST)  
Stanley Van Horn (English Language Center Director)

## Charges to the Institute Writing Committee

The final approved standing committee charges for the IWC for AY2017-2018 were as follows:

IWC 1 – Investigate the current state of writing in graduate programs, taking into account admissions, advising, course work, assessment, and student experience.

IWC 2 – Convene a working subgroup to include at-large key RIT stakeholders (English Language Center Delegate, Wallace Center Delegate, Graduate Education delegate etc.) to write a third section of D01.5 University Writing Policy addressing graduate writing. This policy should i) provide a clear directive as to how graduate programs must participate in graduate writing improvement, and ii) modify the policy such that full buy-in from graduate programs is accomplished, based on discussions from IWC 1.

IWC 3 – Add graduate writing to IWC’s oversight and to evaluate generation or modification of associated policy across domestic and overseas campuses. Bring to senate any necessary amendment to Policy B02.0 for senate discussion and vote.

IWC 4 – Monitor and report to AS on the implementation and assessment of the Institute Writing Policy.

IWC 5 – Review proposed WI courses.

IWC 6 – Review COF Appendix B for internal consistency, as well as consistency with Appendix A (Gen Ed).

IWC 7 – Serve as the faculty liaison with the University Writing Program and other writing-related initiatives, making recommendations when appropriate.

IWC8 – Make recommendations on how current Institute Writing policy that addresses desired language and level of writing proficiency may be clarified.

IWC1 through IWC 3 are new charges and are related graduate writing whereas IWC4 through IWC8 are ongoing charges that are related to undergraduate writing.

The committee efforts to implement the Institute Writing Policy have focused on three areas: current state of graduate writing, monitoring the development and approval of WI course offerings, and working with the UWP to identify areas of support for faculty teaching First Year, General Education, and Program WI courses.

The following sections provide updates as to where we stand with respect to each of these charges.

## Graduate Writing

To address IWC1, a subcommittee of the IWC was tasked to prepare a survey. The survey goals were to:

- Understand the nature/scope of graduate writing requirements in order to focus support and resource recommendations (IWC1)
- Identify areas of inquiry needing follow-up (IWC2)
- Provide guidance on policy creation or revision (IWC3)

After receiving and incorporating feedback from the Dean of Graduate Education (Twyla Cummins) and members of the Grad Council sub-committee on writing (Linda Underhill), the survey was sent out in January to all graduate program directors.

The survey had 13 questions covering writing requirements and assessments for admission and beginning of program, writing-related learning outcomes in the graduate curricula, methods of writing support, and writing-related graduation requirements. A copy of the questionnaire is attached.

The response rate to the survey was 80% (64 of 80 of programs are represented in the results)

## Findings

This section summarizes the findings from the survey.

The table below provides the percentage of programs (out of 64) that require or provide an option for students to do either a thesis, capstone or a comprehensive exam to graduate from their program

	Thesis	Capstone	Comprehensive Exam
Required	45%	22%	17%
Required or Option	75%	48%	27%

Given the high a number of programs that include a thesis or capstone project, this raised the question: **how much writing support is needed to meet a program's thesis or capstone requirements?** A first step to answer this can be seen in the tables that provide information on the number of programs

offering courses with one or more writing-related student learning outcomes (SLOs). Reviewing the courses and SLOs which support writing within curriculum will enable us to ask further questions to determine how writing may be appropriately scaffolded across the curriculum to support student success.

	Thesis or Capstone	No Thesis Or Capstone		
Offers course with writing-related SLO	48	2	1	36% (n=18)
NO course with writing-related SLO	11	3	2+	46% (n=23)
			"All"	18% (n=9)

Program directors were also asked about types of available writing support. The following tables provide information on the number of programs offering writing support and the type of support students receive.

	Yes	No	Forms of support	N=29
Does the program offer specific support services to students who express a need for writing support or who do not meet course or thesis deadlines	38%	62%	Referral to Writing Commons or ELC	48%
			Advisor/Committee	38%
			"Writing Coach"	14%
			Specific Course	10%
Does the program offer specific writing support outside of coursework?	19%	81%	Writing Workshops	3%

This information allows us to explore **how to support writing effectively**.

The survey asked graduate directors about practices for evaluating student writing of all applicants at the admission phase and of all students at the beginning of their graduate program. Here, we discovered, as shown in the table below, that there is no consistent assessment of writing skills of ALL students prior to or at the beginning of graduate education.

	Yes	No
GRE/GMAT	36%	64%
Personal Statement or Writing Sample	59%	41%
Assessment of writing at start of program	22%	78%

The survey also asked about the assessment of international student writing in particular as part of their acceptance to RIT. The following tables show that nearly all graduate programs use TOEFL requirements for admission and show that graduate programs have sorted themselves into three ranges of admissions standards. These ranges were then compared to the program graduation requirements, as a way to begin to investigate **how program standards align with graduation requirements and where opportunities for writing development and support might be**. A breakdown of graduation requirements of programs who use the lower admission range (TOEFL 79-81) is provided.

	Yes
TOEFL	99%
TOEFL Score 79-81	51%
TOEFL Score 88-93	46%
TOEFL Score 100	2%

TOEFL Score 79-81 (21 Programs)	
Requires Thesis	48%
Requires Capstone	24%
Requires Thesis + Capstone	19%
Options: Thesis or Capstone	10%

More analysis needs to be done on the data we have collected which will be then followed up with a second round of questions to specific programs. We also plan to investigate graduate student and faculty advisor experience to complete the picture of the status of graduate writing at RIT.

After this data collection and analysis phase is complete, IWC2 and IWC3 will be addressed which focus on

- Convening a comprehensive working subgroup to write a third section of D01.5 University Writing Policy
- Add graduate writing to IWC's oversight and to evaluate generation or modification of associated policy across domestic and overseas campuses.

## Undergraduate Writing

### IWC4 and IWC 5: Course Approval and Monitoring

The committee reviewed all "Writing Intensive" (WI) course materials submitted. The registrar was informed of all courses approved as WI by the committee, and an IWC spreadsheet was updated online each semester. The IWC reviewed and approved 14 courses during the 2017-2018 Academic Year. Over

all, since becoming a standing committee of the Academic Senate, the IWC has approved 170 courses as WI.

### Identifying Areas of Faculty Support

The UWP director initiated a “college partnership program” with GCCIS. As part of that partnership, a survey was distributed to each department in the college, along with department meeting visits, to begin collecting information about the types of writing valued and assigned in the college. The feedback provided by faculty (n=49) will help determine the focus of planned follow-up interviews and the offering of faculty learning communities.

The committee is also making revisions to the IWC website and converting it into Drupal in order to make the current site more user friendly and practical. The IWC will continue to make improvements to the website.

### Assessing Writing Intensive Courses

#### First Year Writing (FYW)

The University Writing Program works with the Office of Educational Effectiveness Assessment (OEAA; formerly the Office of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment) to assess specific learning outcomes: Revise and improve written products; Express oneself effectively in common college-level written forms using standard American English; and Use relevant evidence gathered through accepted scholarly methods and properly acknowledge sources of information. General Education assessment reports are available [here](#). David Martins, Director of the University Writing Program, is the contact person for the assessment of FYW.

#### General Education Writing Intensive (WI-GE)

With the recent approval of General Education Essential Outcomes and their inclusion in the new RIT Course Outline, assessment of WI-GE courses can be accomplished following the approved General Education Assessment Plan prepared by the Office of Educational Effectiveness Assessment and has been approved by the General Education Committee. As with other General Education assessment projects, faculty teams can be brought together to assess relevant Gen Ed learning outcomes (e.g., Revise and improve written products; Express oneself effectively in common college-level written forms using standard American English). As appropriate, student materials produced in WI-GE courses might also be used in the assessment of other relevant learning outcomes (e.g., the “Critical Thinking” learning outcome as it pertains to writing projects in specific WI-GE courses).

#### Program Writing Intensive (WI-PR)

Every program has developed a “Program Level Outcomes Assessment Plan” (PLOAP). The IWC recommends that each program regularly assess its own WI course(s) as part of its assessment plan. Some programs already have a program-level writing goal and student learning outcome. If the assessment of WI-PR courses has not already been integrated into their assessment plans, programs have a number of opportunities:

1. Programs revise their current assessment plans to include a program goal related to writing and a program SLO related to writing and designate a WI-PR course(s) as the assessment method.
2. Programs align their current WI-PR course-level writing outcome and course to an existing program goal or SLO.

3. Programs align their current WI-PR course-level writing outcome and course to a new Program Goal and SLO.

IWC members and the director of the University Writing Program can serve as support personnel, consulting with program faculty in the articulation of program goals and in the design and implementation of the writing outcome assessment. As those assessments are completed and the results reported to the OEEA, the IWC will highlight the findings of each program's assessment as part of its own yearly reporting on the impact of the institute writing policy.

The IWC, along with other campus programs and committees (e.g., the UWP, OEEA, and Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee), will collaborate together to develop a Program WI questionnaire that seeks to identify current challenges and opportunities for integrating WI-PR course learning outcomes assessment into existing PLOAPs. That questionnaire would also help identify current practice in WI-PR assessment. Existing examples of programs articulating writing-related program goals and learning outcomes, and their methods of assessing those outcomes, will be made available to the campus community.

#### [IWC6 - COF Appendix B for internal consistency](#)

Completed. We reviewed the COF and are in the process of updating information on the WI website.

#### [IWC 7 - Liaison with the University Writing Program and other writing-related initiatives](#)

Status: On-going.

#### [IWC 8 - Recommendations on clarifications on the Institute Writing policy](#)

We discussed how to evaluate courses from the new Modern Languages and Cultures degree program. When evaluating modern language courses for WI status, we highlight the first point in the Institute Writing policy: "1) Writing practice and instruction foster higher order thinking and cultivate critical intellectual processes such as analyzing ideas, solving problems, and evaluating claims."

Therefore, we believe advanced language courses might best meet the IWC requirements.

### [Possible IWC Charges for AY2018-19](#)

IWC 1 – Draft a third section of D01.5 University Writing Policy addressing graduate writing, after completing an investigation of the current state of writing in graduate programs, which includes a working subgroup comprised of at-large key RIT stakeholders (e.g., Wallace Center delegate, Writing Commons coordinator, Graduate Education delegate, etc.) and an investigation into graduate student experience. This policy should i) provide a clear directive as to how graduate programs participate in graduate writing support and improvement, ii) modify the policy such that full buy-in from graduate programs is accomplished, based on discussions from IWC 1.

IWC2 - Add graduate writing to IWC's oversight and to evaluate formulation or modification of associated policy across domestic and overseas campuses. Bring to senate any necessary amendment to Policy B02.0 for senate discussion and vote.

IWC 3 – Propose allocation of resources for the support of graduate student writing based on findings from IWC1.

IWC 4 – Monitor and report to AS the implementation and assessment of the Institute Writing Policy.

IWC 5 – Review proposed WI courses.

IWC 6 – Review COF Appendix B for internal consistency, as well as consistency with Appendix A (Gen Ed)

IWC 7 – Serve as the faculty liaison with the University Writing Program and other writing-related initiatives, making recommendations when appropriate.