

University Writing Committee

Standing Charges

Responsibilities of the UWC (Policy D0.10, Section VI, Part C)

Responsibility 1:

Facilitate the implementation of the University Writing Policy

The UWC reviewed 27 courses during AY 2022-2023. Of these, 17 courses were new courses proposed to carry a WI designation, and 10 courses were previously approved as WI but were updated to include Appendix B. All but four courses were approved and copies sent to the Registrar's Office, the originating college and the associated scheduling officer. Documentation for approved courses is being maintained on the UWC Google Drive and includes a spreadsheet tracking the approval process for each course submitted.

Responsibility 2

Act as a liaison between all academic units to determine student and faculty needs regarding implementation of the writing policy.

Responsibility 3

Define priorities for adequate professional and curricular support for both students and faculty.

Responsibility 4

Stay current with research on best practices with writing program administration, assess the feasibility and desirability for instituting these practices at RIT, and make recommendations accordingly.

Responsibility 5

Serve in an advisory role in the development of assessment methods for writing course outcomes.

The committee did not purposefully spend significant time on Responsibilities 2-5 this academic year. The results of the faculty writing survey, part of the WAC Assessment, will serve to inform the committee as to how best to liaise with faculty.

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Responsibility 6

Assess the Writing across the Curriculum Program.

See Continuing Charge 2 below for a summary of activities related to assessing the WAC program.

Chair's Summary

Committee chair would like to thank all the committee members for all the hard work they did serving on the UWC this year, which included distributing a survey to their college's faculty, supporting revisions to courses requiring an updated Appendix B, attending weekly Zoom meetings, reviewing WI courses, and discussing potential updates to the writing policy.

UWC members for 2022-2023

Gretchen Wainwright (CET), Chair

Jennifer Bailey (KGCOE)

Mari Jaye Blanchard (CAD)

Tom Hanney (SOIS)

Robert Glick/Lisa Hermsen (CLA)

Matthew Houdek (Provost's delegate)

Morgan Keeney (Student Government)

Pamela Kincheloe (Director, University Writing Program)

Rachel Mazique (At Large)

Cha Ron Sattler-Leblanc (Senior Director, Academic Success Center)

Kathryn Schmitz (NTID)

Ben Steele (GCCIS)

Shawn Sturgeon (SCB)

Nancy Valentage (CHST)

Stanley Van Horn (Director, English Language Center)

Leslie Kate Wright (COS)

During AY 2022-2023, the committee made significant progress addressing the important charges it was given. Given the scope of the charges, many of them will continue into AY 2023-2024. Our significant accomplishments include the delivery and analysis of a faculty survey to determine current practices and needs, and the formulation of proposed policy changes for the University Writing Policy. Next year, the committee will continue to review and approve new WI courses and exiting WI courses updated with Appendix B.

The survey of faculty teaching writing intensive courses revealed some weaknesses in the manner in which writing intensive courses are taught. Most notably:

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- Only about half (57%) of the instructors indicated they had read the course outline for the WI course they taught. If faculty have not read the outline, it is doubtful that appropriate writing instruction is being delivered and that the writing related student outcomes are being met.
- A wide variety of informal and formal writing techniques are being utilized. Some faculty responses indicate confusion about what constitutes formal and informal writing. This suggests that some additional guidance on the differences between formal and informal writing might be needed on the UWC website.
- Only 75% of instructors indicated using "drafting and revision (as a course requirement)" in their courses. This is somewhat concerning since providing students with an opportunity to revise their work after receiving feedback is a requirement of all WI courses.
- Eighty percent of the survey respondents indicated that they assess "grammar, punctuation, and spelling" as part of student writing. Not only is this an equity issue, but focusing on grammar and punctuation decreases the time spent providing feedback on other important aspects of student writing, such as the student's ability to explain complex topics or their application of critical thinking skills.

The UWC would like to partner with the University Writing Program to develop and deliver training and support to faculty teaching writing intensive courses.

The UWC has relied upon a Google Drive for several years to manage all documents and track approvals. It contains copies of approved courses back to 2018, meeting notes, and annual reports, among other important information.

Recommendations for Future Charges

New Charge #1:

Collaborate with UWP to develop workshops and training for faculty based on the needs identified in the 2022-2023 WI faculty survey and communicate the need for resources to the administration as necessary.

New Charge #2:

Collaborate with the UWP, DEIC, and other committees and departments as appropriate to develop and host workshops/tutorials/trainings for faculty about the negative impact that implicit and explicit linguistic bias has on students from diverse language backgrounds, and recommend how to address these issues in classrooms, assignment design, and syllabi.

Previous and Continuing Charges

Continuing Charges from 2021-2022:

Continuing Charge 1

Coordinate with the Office of Effective Educational Assessment about the mechanism and logistics related to implementing the Graduate Writing Policy in the revised D01.5.

There was no significant progress on this charge due to the change in leadership and structure of the EEA Office. Representatives from EEA, Graduate Council, RIT Graduate School, the English Language Center, the UWP and the UWC met at the end of the semester to discuss a path forward. This charge will be carried over to AY 2023-2024.

Continuing Charge 2

Collaborate with the Provost's Office and the appropriate university-wide resources and faculty committees (possibly including the UWP, ICC, DEIC, EEA, and others) to develop a plan and timeline to assess Writing Across the Curriculum at RIT during AY2022-2023.

Continuing Charge 6

Propose a process for updating course outlines for currently approved WI courses that do not have an Appendix B attached to the course outline.

Charges 2 and 6 are summarized together below because they both relate to assessing the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program.

This year, the UWC sought to answer two questions:

1. Are WI-GE and WI-PR course outlines consistent with the current writing policy?
2. How are instructors teaching their WI courses? Are they aware of the course outline and Appendix B? What types of pedagogy are being used? What type of support do instructors teaching WI courses need?

Some outlines for writing intensive courses were not updated when the new writing policy went into effect in 2014. These course are missing Appendix B, which describes how the course is meeting the writing intensive course requirements. Committee members worked with their college curriculum committees to determine which course outlines lacked Appendix B. We determined that 82 courses out of approximately 170 WI-GE and WI-PR courses need updating. Committee members are working with their college curriculum committees to update courses missing Appendix B, which may include modifying the list of topics and intended Student Learning Outcomes to align with the writing policy. For Spring courses, the deadline for submitting updated course outlines to the UWC is November 6, 2023. For Fall courses, the deadline is April 1, 2024.

To answer the second question, a survey was developed and distributed it to WI instructors in Fall 2022. 78 out of 197 instructors responded (40% response rate). A summary of the survey results and recommendations based on the results are attached to this report.

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Some notable results are given in the Chair's summary above.

Charge 2 will be carried over into AY 2023-2024. The focus will initially be on getting faculty the training and support they desire so they can feel comfortable teaching WI courses. In support of this activity, the University Writing Program (UWP) has developed a new 3-year rotating position to lead the Writing Across the Curriculum program.

Continuing Charge 3

Update Policy D01.0 to more clearly reflect the roles of the UWP and the UWC with respect providing writing-related resources and instruction to RIT faculty.

Charge 3 relates to the responsibilities that were assigned to the University Writing Committee when the current writing policy was approved. At that time, the vision for the UWC was different than its current operating state. With the appointment of a WAC coordinator in UWP, the UWC believes that some of these responsibilities are better suited to the UWP. For example one of the responsibilities better suited to the UWP is to stay current with research on best practices in writing program administration, assess the feasibility and desirability for instituting these practices at RIT, and make recommendations accordingly. This charge will be carried over to AY 2023-2024.

Current AY Charges

Continuing Charge 4

Explore adding a requirement to the University's writing policy to recertify courses as Writing Intensive at some frequency between 5 and 10 years.

Charge 4 addresses the need to ensure that WI courses are periodically reviewed and to confirm that faculty are aware of the writing pedagogy given in the outline. However, until an electronic course management system is in place, it is not feasible to implement across the university. The UWC encourages colleges to review their WI course outlines at least every 5-7 years to ensure writing requirements are met. This charge will be carried over to AY 2023-2024.

Continuing Charge 5

Explore the University Writing Policy's writing requirements and expectations for total time, topics, effort, fraction of grade, and credit hours prior to graduation as appropriate. Current policy only requires 3 courses to be taken to fulfill the writing requirement and fraction of grade required assumes a 3 credit course.

Charge 5 addresses the question of whether or not a minimum number of credit hours, or other measures related to the amount of writing, should be added to the Writing Policy. The current writing policy only requires that 3 courses be taken to fulfill the writing requirement, with 20% of the grade based on writing. For comparison, the Gen Ed Immersion requirement requires 3 courses and a minimum of 9 credit hours.

For a number of different reasons, several programs have recently asked about using a 1 or 2 credit hour WI-PR course as their only WI-PR course. Since the writing policy does not specifically require WI courses to be 3 credit hours, the committee has approved several 2 credit hours WI-PR courses. The committee's concern is over using these courses as the only WI-PR courses in a program.

In order to prevent any potential erosion of programmatic writing, the majority of the committee agreed that the writing policy should be changed to require at least 9 credit hours total of WI courses in each program, requiring at least 3 credit hours of programmatic writing. The committee is not proposing that all WI course be 3 credit hours because at least one program uses a sequence of two 2 credit hours WI-PR courses in their program.

In addition, language to clarify that the requirement for 20% of the grade that is based on writing applies to individual formal writing assignments is also added to the proposed policy.

Of the more than 80 bachelor's degree programs at RIT, there are currently only three programs with less than 9 credit hours WI in the curriculum: CHME, BIME, and MECE. To prevent any negative impacts on these programs, the UWC is proposing to grant CHME, BIME, and MECE permanent exceptions to the new policy. In addition, future programs would be allowed to petition for an exception to the requirement of 3 credit hours WI-PR, 9 credit hours total WI courses. A copy of the proposed policy changes is attached to this report.

The proposed policy changes were presented to ICC in mid-April. The primary concern expressed by the ICC seemed to be the potential restriction of writing pedagogy if WI-PR courses are required to be 3 credit hours. It was pointed out that there is more writing in some 2-credit courses than in some 3-credit courses, so 2 credit hour courses should be able to be approved as writing intensive. While the UWC acknowledges that this is may be true, it is not a reason to dismiss a requirement for 3 credit hour courses, particularly since 3 credit hours is essentially the status-quo with respect to programmatic writing intensive courses. The UWC would also like to point out that WI-PR courses are not writing courses. They are courses in which discipline specific writing is incorporated into the course in order

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to not only facilitate learning and comprehension, but also to prepare students for the types of writing they will experience as professionals in the workplace. If a 2 credit hour course is capable of achieving the same learning outcomes to the same level as a 3 credit hour course, then the exception process (as part of the proposed policy changes) will document this and the 2 credit hour course would be approved.

A more detailed summary of responses to ICC's questions and concerns is attached to this report following the proposed policy changes.

In AY 2023-2024, the UWC plans to resume this discussion with the ICC and bring these policy changes to the Faculty Senate for a vote. This charge will be carried over to AY 2023-2024.

**Summary of Findings from the UWC's Fall 2022 Survey of
Faculty Teaching Writing Intensive Courses**

May 2023

Background Information on Respondents

At the start of Fall semester 2022, the UWP distributed a survey to faculty identified as teaching at least one writing intensive course. The purpose of the survey was to ensure that faculty teaching WI courses were aware of the course outline and its requirements for writing, gather input on their current writing practices, and solicit input on the type of support faculty need. The Qualtrics survey was distributed to 197 faculty throughout all colleges. Seventy six faculty (39%) responded to the survey. The distribution list was based on a download of SIS data for instructors teaching a Writing Intensive (WI) course in Spring 2022 (2215) and/or Fall 2022 (2221). In other words, each instructor had taught a WI course at least once. The rank of respondents was not recorded, and adjunct instructors were not excluded from the survey. When the survey was initially distributed, an error prevented respondents from indicating their college. After the error was corrected, the college affiliation was recorded for 61% of the total number of respondents. Of these, the majority (70%) were from three colleges – CAD, CLA and SCB. Twenty two percent of the faculty responding indicated they taught a general education writing intensive course (WI-GE) and 68% indicated they taught a programmatic writing intensive course (WI-PR). Two instructors taught both types of courses and nine instructors (12%) were not sure of the type of WI course they were teaching.

Appendix B of the Course Outline form provides specific information about how each WI course will meet the requirements of the University Writing Policy ([D01.5](#)). These include:

- Instruction in at least one writing-related learning outcome.
- Informal and formal writing assignments sequenced during the course intended as "writing to learn" and "learning to write" assignments.
- How students will receive feedback from instructors and have an opportunity to use that feedback to complete substantive revision of written work.
- Classroom discussion of particular writing conventions and strategies specific to the discipline or profession.
- A minimum of 20% of the grade for the course must be based on the extent to which students display program writing criteria.

Since an understanding of the content within the course outline for WI courses is important, survey respondents were asked about their familiarity with the outline for the course they teach. Just over half (57%) of the instructors indicated they had read the course outline. An additional 20% of the respondents were aware of the outline but had not read it, but almost a quarter of the instructors (24%) were not aware of the course outline for the WI course they taught.

Concern: If faculty are not aware of the writing policy requirements and course specific pedagogy provided in the course outline, it is doubtful that students are receiving the writing instruction they need and that the writing related student outcome is being met.

Class capacity

Table 1: Results from Question #4 – Typical Class Capacity

Class Capacity	# of Responses	% of Responses	Cumulative % of Responses
10 or less	4	5%	5%
11 to 15	12	16%	22%
16 to 20	20	27%	49%
21 to 25	16	22%	70%
26 to 30	10	14%	84%
over 30	12	16%	100%

The University Writing Policy does not prescribe nor recommend a maximum number of students in a WI course. Capacity is often a faculty concern due to the time commitment for assessment necessary in a WI course. While there are techniques for reducing the amount of time spent on grading, the fact remains that at least one formal writing assignment must be reviewed and returned to students with feedback. The University Writing Program limits the First Year Writing course to 20 students. The survey results show that about 50% of the courses taught by the respondents are limited to 20 students or less, and 84% of the courses were limited to 30 students or less. The remaining 16% of courses contained over 30, and as many as 70 students. Many of the courses with large capacities provide multiple instructors.

In general, instructors should not struggle excessively with grading workload if they are familiar with assignment design and assessment techniques that can be used to decrease instructor time spent on grading. (See results for question 16, types of writing support preferred.)

Student Learning Outcomes

Table 2: Results from Question #5 - Primary Course Student Learning Outcome

Writing Intensive courses must include (at least) one writing-related course learning outcome. From the list below, and to the best of your ability, what is the primary WI course outcome required in your class?	Number of responses	% of Respondents
Demonstrate the ability to use writing as a way of communicating ideas.	34	45%
Demonstrate proficiency in disciplinary writing conventions appropriate to the course.	23	30%
Identify discipline-specific ways of writing.	7	9%
Use writing as a tool to discover ideas.	7	9%
Demonstrate a degree of mastery in writing a paper in the format of a journal.	4	5%
Demonstrate awareness of writing norms for assigned disciplinary Style Guide(s).	1	1%

Writing intensive courses must include at least one writing-related course learning outcome. Survey respondents were given a choice of six typical learning outcomes and asked to select the primary outcome in the WI course they taught. Seventy-five percent of the respondents selected either “demonstrate the ability to use writing as a way of communicating ideas” or “demonstrate proficiency in disciplinary writing conventions appropriate to the course”. Only 7% of respondents identified using writing as a tool to discover ideas as a learning outcome. This may be due to the way in which the question was set up. Respondents could only pick one learning outcome from the list, when in fact their course may have two learning outcomes on the given list. However, one point to note is that since only 57% of respondents have read the course outline, the responses to this question may represent the instructor's perception more than the actual learning outcomes provided in the course outline.

Writing Conventions

Table 3: Results from Question #6 – Writing Conventions

Which writing conventions do you prioritize in your class through lectures, discussion, or other classroom modules?	# of Responses	Average	Weighted Average	% of Responses 7 or greater
Use of evidence	72	7.9	8.13	83
Organization	75	8.0	8.01	80
Audience awareness	75	7.6	7.57	71
Writing in the discipline	76	7.5	7.47	71
Spelling, grammar, punctuation	72	7.1	7.15	67
Citation	64	6.5	6.84	63
Source integration	67	6.6	6.72	61
Thesis development	60	6.3	6.43	60
Research question development	59	6.0	6.17	53
Vocabulary	66	6.0	6.02	44
Genre conventions	58	5.5	5.76	43

Faculty were presented with a list of eleven different writing conventions that the literature mentions as typical for writing courses. (Note: This is not a list of best practices, though some of the items are best practices.) Respondents were asked to indicate how they prioritized each convention in their class through lectures, discussion, or other classroom modules on a scale of 1 to 10, with a rating of 1 signifying "Not important at all and 10 indicating "Very important." Some faculty did not provide a response in every category.

It is difficult to evaluate and derive significant conclusions from the Likert-scale data like that collected for Question 6. The analysis of scalar data such as Likert results should not involve parametric statistics, such as averages, medians, and standard deviations. A more correct way to analyze the data is to determine the percentage of responses for each of the ratings (1 to 10) in each of the eleven categories. Unfortunately, while these results are more analytically appropriate, they are also more difficult to interpret. For the sake of correctness, a non-scalar analysis has been provided in Appendix to this report.

Correctness aside, the average results can provide some insight into the utilization of various writing conventions by survey respondents. Of the two averages shown in Table 3, the weighted average is more correct (it excludes null responses). The table does provide some scalar-type results by including the percentage of responses in each category that were a 7 (Reasonably Important) or higher. Overall it appears that faculty are using a number of different writing conventions in their courses, which is very positive finding.

Types of Informal Writing Assignments

Table 4: Results from Question #7 – Types of Informal Writing Exercises

What kinds of informal (writing-to-learn) writing exercises do you assign in your WI course? Select all that apply.	Number of responses	% of Respondents
Reaction/Response writing	43	57%
Brainstorming	34	45%
Discussion posts	31	41%
Free writing	27	36%
Emails/Communications	24	32%
Other	24	32%
Journal writing	14	18%
Notebooks	14	18%

For this survey question, faculty were provided with seven common types of informal writing assignments and asked to indicate those which were used in their classes. The results demonstrate that a wide variety of techniques are being utilized, with journal writing and notebooks being significantly less utilized than the other approaches. In the twenty-two written comments provided, however, two respondents indicated assigning research papers as an informal writing assignment. While the early drafts of research papers might be considered informal writing, completed research papers should most likely be considered a type of formal writing rather than informal writing. This suggests that some additional guidance and what is considered informal writing might be needed on the UWC website.

Types of Formal Writing Assignments

Table 5: Results from Question #8 – Types of Formal Writing Exercises

What kinds of formal (learning to write) writing exercises do you assign in your WI course? Select all that apply.	Number of responses	% of Respondents
Research Projects	37	49%
Essays	35	46%
Proposals	31	41%
Literature Reviews	22	29%
Critiques	20	26%
Annotated Bibliographies	18	24%
Collaborative/Co-Authored Projects	18	24%
Laboratory Reports	15	20%
Case Studies	14	18%
Multimodal Projects	13	17%
Other	12	16%
Creative writing	11	14%
Biographical Projects	8	11%
Promotional and Advertising copy	3	4%

Faculty were provided with a list of thirteen common types of formal writing assignments and asked to indicate those which were used in their classes. Research papers, essays and proposals are the most frequently assigned. The “other” responses provided by faculty indicate wide variety of different types of assignments are being given, which is consistent with the objective of teaching writing in the discipline in programmatic WI courses.

Some assignment examples include: Interview questions, speech writing, discipline specific documentation of software design/development, news articles or press releases, book reviews, technical feasibility study reports, and artist statements and press releases.

Revision/Feedback Methods

Table 6: Results from Question #9 – Types of Revision/Feedback Methods

What writing feedback/revision methods do you use in your WI course? Select all that apply.	Number of responses	% of Respondents
Drafting and revision (as a course requirement)	57	75%
Substantive comments	50	66%
Markings on documents	48	63%
Comments and scores on a Rubric	47	62%
In-class workshops with peers	40	53%
Marginal comments	37	49%
One-on-one or small group meetings with the instructor	28	37%
Proofreading and substantive editing	23	30%
Pre-writing or brainstorming	17	22%
Verbal feedback (recorded, transcribed)	10	13%
Other	7	9%

Respondents were asked to consider ten different responses related to the feedback/revision strategies used in their course and to select all that applied. Only 75% of instructors indicated using "drafting and revision (as a course requirement)" in their courses. This is somewhat concerning since providing students with an opportunity to revise their work after receiving feedback is a requirement of all WI courses. This issue may be related to faculty not having read the course outline, which indicates the type of feedback on formal writing to be provided.

The methods selected by 50% or more of the respondents are well-known and typical of those employed throughout academia. Instructors are comfortable with these methods and no additional training is necessary in order to employ them. Unfortunately, the majority of them are also the most time consuming for instructors. There is a need and an opportunity to coach writing instructors in more streamlined methods, such as video feedback, which was mentioned by several respondents in their comments.

Sources of Feedback

Table 7: Results from Question #10 – Sources of Feedback

Besides the instructor, do others provide feedback on student writing? Select all that apply.	Number of responses	% of Respondents
Classmates	46	61%
No, just the instructor	24	32%
Writing center consultants	11	14%
Peer mentors	7	9%
Undergraduate teaching assistants	7	9%
Graduate teaching assistants	2	3%
Writing fellows	0	0%

In addition to the instructor, 61% of the respondents indicated that classmates were used to provide feedback on student writing. Almost one-third of the respondents indicated that only the instructor provided feedback to students. About 14% of instructors referred students to a writing center for feedback. Comparing these results with those from Question 9 related to the types of feedback provided highlights what is either an anomaly or a difference of interpretation as to how in-class workshops with peers provide writing feedback to fellow students. While over half of the instructors utilize peer review workshops, only about one-third of the instructors seem to incorporate the student's peer review as part of their normal feedback. Since students can improve their own writing by critiquing the writing of others, this is a missed opportunity in many classrooms.

Elements of Writing Assessed

Table 8: Results from Question #11 – Elements of Writing Assessed

From the list below, what elements are being assessed in your students' writing? Select all that apply.	Number of responses	% of Respondents
Grammar, punctuation, and spelling	61	80%
Ability to improve or develop writing through drafting/revision	58	76%
Ability to effectively use, integrate, and cite sources	50	66%
Early/first drafts are graded as low-stakes or informal assignments	33	43%
Only the final draft counts toward major/formal assignment grade	31	41%
Overall originality or contribution to discipline (based on skill level)	30	39%
Early/first drafts are graded as part of final grade for major/formal assignments	22	29%

Eighty percent of the survey respondents selected "grammar, punctuation, and spelling" as an element being assessed in student writing. This is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, unless the instructor is specifically teaching grammar and punctuation within the course, it should not be assessed. Secondly, there are equity issues for students that have learned English as a second language and students who embrace non-standard American English when assessments are based on "Standard American English" (SAE). Lastly, by focusing on grammar and punctuation, instructors are inevitably spending less time providing feedback on other important aspects of student writing, such as the student's ability to explain complex topics or their application of critical thinking skills.

In retrospect, the responses provided to this question are of two different types. Some are based on what is assessed with respect to writing elements and others are based on which drafts are counted as formal or informal writing. The question could have been broken into two questions, one related to writing elements being assessed and the second related to the application of feedback. The writing elements should have included aspects such as making a cohesive argument, synthesizing and presenting information, explaining complex topics, applying critical thinking, and possibly some structural elements like the flow through the document, paragraph structure, etc.

Approach to Assessing SAE Proficiency

Table 9: Results from Question #12 – Approach to Assessing SAE Proficiency

Which of the following reflects your approach to assessing students' knowledge of and proficiency with Standard American English (SAE) in your WI course? Select all that apply.	Number of responses	% of Respondents
I partly assess student writing based on their proficiency with SAE (i.e. I deduct points for “failure” to demonstrate proficiency with SAE)	38	50%
I assess and grade student writing based only what I explicitly teach in my class	26	34%
I provide explicit instruction on SAE writing norms and expectations in my class	17	22%
Other	13	17%
I send all students whose first language is not English or who do not write in SAE to the Writing Center	9	12%

Half of the faculty respondents indicated that they assess students’ writing based on Standard American English (SAE) and about one-quarter of faculty instruct on SAE writing norms. These results are consistent with the results from Question 11, where 80% of faculty responded yes to assessing grammar, spelling and punctuation. The focus on what some would consider to be the language “norm” is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, there equity issues involves with grading students based on SAE proficiency. This often disadvantages students who learned English as a second language, students of color, and deaf and Hard of Hearing students. Secondly, it distracts from the assessment of higher order writing skills and the cognitive process of writing. As indicated above, these include elements such as making a cohesive argument, synthesizing and presenting information, explaining complex topics, and applying critical thinking. Lastly, there is a wealth of evidence that shows that grading grammar does not improve student writing.

About 12% of respondents said they send English-learning students to the Writing Center based on perceived lack of proficiency in SAE. This gives the impression that being sent to the Writing Center is meant as a punitive mechanism or that students are somehow “lesser,” as research has shown.

Approach to Teaching Students with Diverse Language Backgrounds

**Table 10: Results from Question #13 –
Approach to Teaching Students with Diverse Language Backgrounds**

Which of the following reflects your approach to teaching students who come from diverse language backgrounds and/or whose first language is not English in your WI course? Select all that apply.	Number of responses	% of Respondents
I assume that all students share a general competency with Standard American English (SAE) writing norms and expectations prior to coming to my class and do not make any special accommodations	42	55%
I provide students the opportunity to write in their own voice (e.g. their native language, Black vernacular English, different dialects) in written assignments, when appropriate	23	30%
I believe that all students must write in SAE in my course assignments regardless of their language background	22	29%
I assign readings and other texts written by authors that represent diverse language backgrounds	13	17%
I frequently send students to the Writing Center for failure to demonstrate competency with SAE	13	17%
Other	13	17%
I include a syllabus statement asserting that I and/or my class values linguistic diversity	5	7%

Consistent with the responses to question 12, this question shows that most faculty respondents have an expectation that students can write using Standard American English. Only about 30% of faculty indicated that they allow students to write “in their own voice” in some circumstances in their classes. Again, with the hyper-focus on form, there is less of an opportunity to focus on content and encourage higher level writing skills.

Views on Linguistic Bias

Table 11: Results from Question #14 – Views on Linguistic Bias

Which of the following reflects your views on linguistic bias in WI course instruction? Select all that apply.	Number of responses	# of Respondents
I am aware of the negative impact that even implicit linguistic bias has on students from diverse language backgrounds (e.g. their academic performance, confidence, mental health, and sense of belonging)	49	64%
I would be interested learning more and/or reading the scholarship on the negative impact that (even implicit) linguistic bias has on students from diverse language backgrounds	34	45%
I am aware of the negative impact of linguistic bias has on students from diverse language backgrounds and I actively strive to address these issues in my classroom, assignment design, and syllabus	16	21%
I do not believe that linguistic bias has a negative impact on students from diverse language backgrounds	5	7%

The results from question 14 mirror the responses to the two previous questions about SAE and linguistic bias. Otherwise, the results are a bit difficult to interpret as the questions overlap and the respondents could choose more than one answer. What is confusing, however, is that 29% of respondents to Q13 indicated that they believe that all students must write in SAE regardless of their language background, but only 7% responded in Q14 that they do not believe linguistic bias has a negative impact. Does this imply that 22% don't believe there is a connection between SAE and linguistic bias? Regardless, there is clearly a need to educate faculty on the value of language diversity in their classrooms.

Type of Writing Support Preferred by Faculty

Table 12: Results from Question #15 – Type of Writing Support Preferred

What type of writing intensive support would help you teach your WI course more effectively if workshops, resources, or training were provided/available? Select all that apply.	Number of responses	% of Respondents
Instructor feedback strategies	38	50%
Drafting strategies	26	34%
DEI-related writing instruction norms	21	28%
Low-stakes or informal writing assignment ideas	20	26%
Writing in the discipline instruction	20	26%
Assessment models	19	25%
Prewriting or brainstorming models	18	24%
Peer workshopping ideas	15	20%

Three of the eight options for Q15 resulted in marked response, while the remaining five suggested a lesser degree of urgency. Therefore, this report will focus on the top three and suggest ways in which those needs could be addressed. (See recommendations/follow-up section.)

Preferred Delivery Mode for Writing Support

Table 13: Results from Question #16 – Writing Support Preferred Delivery Mode

What would be your preferred mode of delivery for Writing Intensive workshops and training?	Number of responses	% of Respondents
In-person instruction	35	46%
Stable webpage with relevant resources, examples, etc.	21	28%
Synchronous online instruction	18	24%
Hybrid/Multi-modal instruction (combination of the above)	17	22%
Asynchronous (pre-recorded) instruction	11	14%

Clearly, the desire is for hands-on, in person direct instruction in writing pedagogy. Surprisingly, there is little desire for pre-recorded learning modules, which is far more accessible. That said, an argument can be made for creating such modules, especially if a series could be useful for EdX or RIT certified purposes.

Faculty General Comments

Respondents were asked: *What else would you like to share with the University Writing Committee or what questions do you have for us regarding Writing Intensive course instruction?*

Comments referring to courses taught by the respondent were put aside. The remaining comments were grouped into a few categories, summarized below.

Language/Preparedness Concerns Comments:

- Although writing is key to success in most professions, I find that RIT allows foreign speakers into the university when they barely speak the language let alone be able to write it.
- All students should have proven, basic writing skills coming into RIT. Some flexibility for foreign students is acceptable when English is not their first language. Some students clearly come to RIT lacking the essentials. I've had students who don't know how to create separate paragraphs by topic; mis-spell words; fail to capitalize proper nouns; use improper grammar; etc. I just had a student who was starting sentences with lower case letters. Poor punctuation is an issue for some. These problems should be addressed in K-12 education. If we accept students with poor writing skills, then let's focus on teaching them the basics during their first year and raise expectations regardless of their backgrounds.

- My WI classes are all more advanced classes in a particular discipline, and my focus is not on SAE but on meeting disciplinary standards for expression in English (when it comes to research projects, at least). Discussion, brainstorming, journals, responses...these are all things that can be written in the students' preferred voices, so long as I can understand the ideas they're getting across.

Committee Response:

Given previous survey responses, the xenophobic comment is not surprising, but still disturbing. The first two comments boil down to a matter of student preparedness upon matriculation. RIT does not have control over these factors (ie, K-12 education in the US). Nevertheless, RIT needs to work with all accepted students regardless of their entry-level knowledge and skills. Instead of highlighting perceived problems, we need to find ways to support students who may need “the basics.” Along with this, we need to highlight the fact that good grammar does not equal good writing. The final comment reflects what one would hope would be the more commonly shared perspective, going forward, as we strengthen our commitment to non-discriminatory policies in relation to writing and communication.

Pedagogical Concerns Comments:

- Keep the expectation that even 'technical' degrees require solid writing skills! Never want to lose that!
- I've seen WI courses with relatively little written assignments, and non-WI courses that require entirely too much writing. Colleges and departments need to discuss curriculum in order to acknowledge that writing should be assessed only where writing is being actively taught.
- Assessing student writing without teaching students explicitly about writing is unjust and supports an SAE-only perspective that harms all students.

Committee Response

Promoting a general culture of writing across the university might aid in this expectation. Perhaps we need speakers/employers coming in from various professions to speaking the important of discipline-specific written communication skills.

The UWC and UWP share the concerns expressed in the comments about the amount of writing instruction, actual writing, and revision occurring in WI courses. In order to assess these factors, UWC would have to review actual in-class pedagogy. However, until the UWC is comfortable that all the WI course outlines contain Appendix B and faculty are reading and following the course outline, such an assessment would be futile. Eventually, the UWC should develop a program for routine class visits with the goal of helping, not penalizing, faculty.

General Concerns Comments:

- When it comes to the Program Specific Writing Class there is limitations on how much attention can be put on the writing piece. The fact that I have to discuss drafting and revision at the 4th year level leads me to question how well the first two writing specific GE classes are being conducted. It is my impression that the 2nd course has never fully been implemented/supported by the institute. If that perception is true, I think that is where the resources/training need to go.

- The university writing commons has been less than helpful. Mentors do not have the proficiency to address appropriate writing. None have communicated experience with Chicago style citation as appropriate to our field. **That is the job of the instructor** WC staffing undergrads is non-productive

Committee Response

Drafting and revision are emphasized repeatedly in the first year WI courses. This comment illustrates, however, the fact that “transfer” of this knowledge (even if it is reiterated in the GE or “middle” courses) does not always take place. The idea of revision is a definite threshold concept (TC), or an of “troublesome knowledge” that students have difficulty fully absorbing into their educational schema. As a threshold concept, discussion of drafting and revision should be taught by WI instructors throughout all levels and all types of courses. This TC in fact remains troubling often into graduate programs and beyond.

The last comment again serves to reiterate the challenge ahead to overturn the prevailing mindset that writing is all about format and grammar.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1:

Continue to support the timely implementation of an electronic course outline management system at the university. For WI courses in the system, determine the feasibility of requiring faculty to verify annually that they have read the course outlines for the WI courses they teach. Prior to the implementation, explore the ability to send an email each semester to all WI faculty to remind them to read the WI course outlines.

Recommendation #2:

Work with the UWP to develop additional information and resources on the UWC web page as follows:

- Provide additional guidance and examples of what is considered informal writing.
- Provide examples of and encourage other types of formal writing assignments in addition to the typical assignments.
- Provide resources for faculty and students related to peer review to demonstrate how students can improve their own writing by critiquing the writing of others,
- Supplement UWP’s efforts to offer live training for instructors by providing resources and examples of streamlined assessment and feedback methods, such as video feedback.
- Provide examples of “good” feedback on various types of written documents.
- Provide a section which describes the aspects of writing that formal assignments can be designed to demonstrate, such as making a cohesive argument, synthesizing and presenting information, explaining complex topics, and applying critical thinking.
- Provide links to studies or other examples to reinforce the concept that good grammar does not equate to good writing and that grading grammar does not improve student writing.
- Provide assignment resources for low-stakes writing, prewriting, and peer-review drafting activities.

Recommendation #3:

Collaborate with the UWP, DEIC, and other committees and departments as appropriate to develop and host workshops/tutorials/trainings for faculty about the negative impact that implicit and explicit linguistic bias has on students from diverse language backgrounds, and recommend how to address these issues in classrooms, assignment design, and syllabi.

Recommendation #4:

Develop on-boarding materials for new UWC committee members so that they understand their role on the committee and can provide the best support the faculty in their colleges. This would include information about threshold concepts and discipline specific writing.

Recommendation #5:

Collaborate with UWP to develop workshops and training for faculty based on the needs identified in this survey. As necessary, communicate the need for resources for the UWP to the administration so that the needs of faculty and students and goals of the Writing Across the Curriculum program are met. This includes the need for a designated web administrator for UWC and UWP.

Appendix

Breakdown of results from Question 6:

	# of Responses	Percentage of Indicated Rating Received									
		10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Writing in the discipline	72	29	9	16	17	8	8	5	5	3	0
Genre conventions	75	9	5	19	10	10	19	3	5	14	5
Audience awareness	75	24	13	23	11	12	8	4	3	3	0
Organization	76	25	20	24	11	7	9	3	1	0	0
Source integration	72	12	12	24	13	6	15	6	4	4	3
Use of evidence	64	33	17	19	14	3	10	1	1	0	1
Research question development	67	20	10	14	8	7	12	2	7	7	14
Thesis development	60	18	10	18	13	7	8	2	7	5	12
Vocabulary	59	12	3	18	11	9	23	8	8	3	6
Citation	66	20	1	14	14	3	14	5	8	5	3
Spelling, grammar, punctuation	58	21	14	13	19	4	15	6	7	0	1

**Mark-up of Policy D01.5 with
Proposed Revisions**

May 2023

**Summary of UWC's Responses to IIC concerns about
proposed changes to the University Writing Policy**

May 2023

Attachment 2: Proposed modifications to the University Writing Policy, D01.5

D01.5 University Writing Policy

I. Rationale

A. The Writing Policy is informed by these basic tenets:

1. Writing practice and instruction fosters higher order thinking and cultivates critical intellectual processes such as analyzing ideas, solving problems, and evaluating claims.
2. Writing is a complex activity that must be continually adapted to the particular needs of disciplinary and multi-disciplinary contexts.
3. Writing competencies are essential for graduates to secure jobs, advance in their given professions, and participate in all forms of civic life.
4. Students should have primary responsibility for the quality of their writing.
5. If students are to improve their writing, they must be given opportunities to write in a variety of forms and to revise their writing in response to peer and faculty feedback.
6. Faculty in the students' programs are best situated to help their students adapt writing competency to professional contexts.

B. Special Considerations for Graduate Programs

1. Students entering post-baccalaureate education must gain specialized knowledge of their field which includes understanding academic and professional forms of communication within the discipline and an ability to communicate ideas purposefully and effectively within the norms of their discipline.
2. Each Graduate Program determines the writing related requirements and outcomes for its students and prepares its students to write and communicate successfully in the discipline.
3. Graduate Programs “shall normally require a minimum of one academic year of full-time graduate level study, or its equivalent in part-time study, with an accumulation of not less than 30 semester hours. Research or a comparable occupational or professional experience shall be a component of each master's degree program. The requirements for a master's degree shall normally include at least one of the following: passing a comprehensive test, writing a thesis based on independent research or completing an appropriate special project.” (New York State Commissioner’s Regulations, Part 52.2(c)(8)). This requirement includes discipline specific writing and is referred to here as a culminating experience.
4. Through continuous self-assessment, which includes formative and evaluative assessment of student writing, graduate programs provide data regarding student needs and performance on writing outcomes and activities, and these data drive and shape the work of university-wide support programs whose mission is to advance excellence in written communication. Trends and needs for graduate student writing among and across graduate programs must be

Attachment 2: Proposed modifications to the University Writing Policy, D01.5

examined on a regular cycle to inform how university resources are deployed to advance graduate student writing.

II. Writing Across the Curriculum Program Requirement for Undergraduate Programs

A. Student requirements (effective August 1, 2023)

The Writing across the Curriculum Program requirement entails completion of at least three writing intensive (WI) credit-bearing courses totaling at least 9 credit hours for all undergraduate programs.

1. One introductory WI course in the first year, "FYW: Writing Seminar" or other so-designated 3 CR First Year Writing (FYW) course with approval of the First Year Writing Program Director.
2. One course or sequence of courses in the student's degree program (WI-PR), totaling at least 3 credit hours.
3. A third WI course. Ideally this is a general education course (WI-GE), but it may also be an additional second PR-WI course.

Ideally these courses would be distributed through the student's time at RIT (e.g. FYW in the first year, a second WI course in years 2-3, and a WI-PR course in field of specialty in year four).

All undergraduate programs must provide and require at least one discipline-specific WI course (WI-PR). This course should be designed to engage students in writing in the discipline/s represented by the course. Students must be able to complete all WI requirements within the existing graduation requirements, and must successfully complete three WI courses (totaling at least 9 CR) before receiving a degree. Program petitions for exceptions from the 9 CR requirement will be considered on a case by case basis by UWC and ICC.

B. Criteria for Writing Intensive Courses

The following criteria will be met in the designation of "Writing-Intensive" courses:

1. Students must receive instruction in at least one writing-related learning outcome. First Year Writing courses will include a learning outcome related to awareness of the social and intellectual aspects of writing in the university. There are three writing-related learning outcomes described in General Education SLOs. Program WI courses should describe a writing-related learning outcome that is discipline specific.
2. Students must complete informal and formal writing assignments sequenced during the course intended as "writing to learn" and "learning to write" assignments. Examples of informal writing assignments include brainstorming, free writing, journals, and reaction-response essays. Examples of formal writing include but are not limited to critiques, reviews, laboratory reports, case studies, observations, essays, creative writing, proposals, and research papers.
3. Students must receive feedback from instructors and have an opportunity to use that feedback to complete substantive revision of written work. The feedback should facilitate the composing process for formal writing, but give the primary responsibility

Attachment 2: Proposed modifications to the University Writing Policy, D01.5

for revision to the student. This feedback might be supplemented by peer mentors, writing fellows, and writing center ~~instructor~~ consultants.

4. The course must include classroom discussion of particular writing conventions and strategies specific to the discipline or profession. Examples of effective discussions include: revision strategies, peer review, vocabulary, organization, use of evidence, citation, concision and clarity, and removing ambiguity.

~~###~~ 5. A minimum of 20% of the grade for the course must be based on individual formal writing activities outlined above in B. 2. ~~the extent to which students display program writing criteria (i.e., as evaluated by rubrics) in the revision and editing processes of formal writing.~~

III. Writing Requirements for Graduate Programs:

- A. Every graduate program shall have:
 1. At least one student learning outcome specifically related to written communication included within their Program Level Outcomes Assessment Plan (PLOAP), overseen by the Office of Educational Effectiveness Assessment, Academic Affairs.
 2. At least two formative feedback activities related to discipline-specific writing.
 - a. These activities shall be distributed across the program.
 - b. These activities shall be designed to assist students in achieving the writing-related student learning outcome and to prepare students for the required writing within their culminating experience.
- B. Every graduate program at RIT shall submit a report on students' achievement of the writing related student learning outcome (III.A.1) to the Office of Educational Effectiveness Assessment (EEA) at least once every five years. The report will include an attachment (Graduate Plan for Achievement in Writing) reflecting on the formative feedback activities (III.A.2). The Graduate Plan for Achievement in Writing will inform a yearly needs analysis reported to the Academic Senate, the Office of Graduate Education, and the Office of the Provost.

Responsible Office:

Academic Senate and the Office of the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs. For inquiries, contact:

Academic Senate - asenate@rit.edu

Director, University Writing Program - Pamela Kincheloe - pjknge@rit.edu

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Revised March 26, 2020 to add graduate writing requirements - sections I.B and III

**Summary of UWC's Responses to IIC concerns about
proposed changes to the University Writing Policy**

May 2023

Summary of UWC's Responses to IIC concerns about the proposed changes to the University Writing Policy

1. *How is the current university writing policy written with respect to course requirements?*

The current policy requires that three designated writing intensive (WI) courses be taken by all students prior to graduation. One course must be first year writing or equivalent. A second course must be a programmatic writing intensive course (WI-PR), which is designed to engage students in writing typical of that prepared when working in their discipline. The third writing intensive course can be any other course designated as WI-PR or general education writing intensive (WI-GE) in SIS. The current policy does not specify credit hours for each course. However, first-year writing courses and Gen Ed courses are always 3 credit hours.

The requirements for writing intensive courses and the UWC's process for approving writing intensive courses are given in Policies D01.5, II.B. and D01.0, VI.C, respectively. The writing intensive requirements within policy are very open ended and do not contain "minimums", such as word counts, number of assignments, number of writing topics covered, and number of formal and informal assignments. Given the wide variety of disciplines taught at RIT, it would be impractical and extremely difficult to write one set of standard, detailed writing-related requirements that would be appropriate for every program.

2. *Why are you proposing clarification to the policy now?*

Updating the policy at this time is intended to maintain the status quo and prevent any potential erosion of the use of writing in and across the curriculum. Both the University Writing Program (UWP) and the University Writing Committee (UWC) have recently been receiving inquiries about whether the only WI-PR course in a program could be 1 or 2 credit hours. While we responded that they should be 3 credit hours based on information on the UWC web page and the fact that this requirement has been imposed on almost all WI courses since the policy was implemented, we realized that there was no credit requirement in the policy. Therefore, the committee decided to clarify the policy to require at least 9 credit hours total, with each component being at least 3 credit hours.

The updated policy will not require that all WI courses be 3 credit hours. Instead, it allows programs the flexibility to combine 1 and 2 credit hour WI courses in sequence to achieve the proposed 3 credit hour minimum. For programs that do not currently meet the proposed 9 credit hour minimum, an exception process is being incorporated into the updated policy. This process will also be available to new programs as they are developed and existing programs if they are modified, allowing them flexibility, if necessary, when incorporating discipline specific writing.

3. *Why are you recommending a credit hour requirement instead of some other measure such as the amount of writing completed?*

We are recommending a credit hour requirement because it is basically how the policy is currently being interpreted. All the first-year writing and WI-GE courses are currently 3 credit hours. Despite there being no credit hour requirement for WI-PR courses, currently all but three bachelor's degree programs have a 3 credit hour WI-PR course as part of their curriculum, thus meeting the 9 credit hour proposed minimum.

Summary of UWC's Responses to IIC concerns about the proposed changes to the University Writing Policy

A credit hour also has a standard definition, based on instructional and outside assignment hours, as indicated in the Codes, Rules and Regulations of the State of New York, Title 8 – Education Department, Chapter II, Subchapter A, Part 50, Section 50.1 (o):

“Semester hour means a credit, point, or other unit granted for the satisfactory completion of a course which requires at least 15 hours (of 50 minutes each) of instruction and at least 30 hours of supplementary assignments, except as otherwise provided pursuant to section 52.2(c)(4) of this Subchapter. This basic measure shall be adjusted proportionately to translate the value of other academic calendars and formats of study in relation to the credit granted for study during the two semesters that comprise an academic year.”

Since credit hours are the method by which all degree requirements are RIT are tracked, it is logical and consistent to use credit hours to define the writing requirement for all WI courses. Relying on credit hours is also consistent with the degree audit system in SIS, currently used by students to determine if program requirements are met.

4. *Why not base the requirement on “Time on Task” rather than credit hours because the credit hours do not accurately reflect how much writing might be occurring in a course.*

There are several reasons why this is an impractical and problematic approach. Firstly, there is no standard definition of “time on task” in RIT or NYSED policy. It would be virtually impossible to develop and apply such a measure uniformly in WI-PR courses, since the application of writing in programmatic writing courses is discipline specific and there are a wide range of disciplines taught at RIT. In addition, the University Writing Policy itself does not contain time or writing volume related requirements, so this approach would necessitate further changes in the writing policy.

Secondly, no other academic, program, or course requirement imposed at RIT is based on time on task. The writing policy in itself does not impose minimum or maximum amounts of writing or time spent discussing writing. When the UWC approves a course as WI, we look for the presence of these elements, not the quantity. Since the writing related learning outcomes differ from course to course, the amount and type of writing will differ as well and should not be arbitrarily specified by the writing policy or the UWC. When a course is developed, it is the responsibility of the course originator, the instructor and the college curriculum committee to determine what topics and pedagogy are appropriate to meet the learning outcomes of that course, including the writing related learning outcomes. For WI-PR courses, it is the responsibility of the college curriculum committees determine if writing is being utilized effectively in their courses.

Thirdly, requiring time on task reinforces the outdated and potentially detrimental concept that learning, in particular writing, is based on time and volume. In writing intensive courses, writing is utilized as a means to help students develop discipline specific skills and achieve course learning outcomes. For example, informal writing, known as writing to learn, helps students think critically about a subject. It is a way to provide students with opportunities to recall, clarify, and question what they know and would like to know about a subject. If some sort of minimum requirement was specified, faculty developing future WI courses might believe that a minimum amount is all that should be incorporated, when in fact the amount is discipline specific and really should be incorporated into a course to the maximum extent possible.

Summary of UWC's Responses to IIC concerns about the proposed changes to the University Writing Policy

Lastly, but most importantly, requiring a specific time on task for writing instruction and writing ignores the diversity of students and their learning needs. This approach would favor non-diverse students and would be an equity issue for those students for whom English is a second language and those that are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, among others.

5. *What is meant by "individual writing"?*

Individual writing refers to a written artifact that was prepared and written only by one person. Individual written assignment submitted for grading can consist of writing prepared only by one student, or can be comprised of individually written sections combined into a larger document (for example, a lab report or design report). Twenty percent of each student's grade must be based on the assessment of only individually prepared written artifacts. In courses where students work in groups and only submit group assignments, the students will need to inform the instructor which sections they prepared individually. This clarification will be incorporated into the final policy recommendation put forth by the UWC.

6. *Why are you proposing an exception process?*

There are currently three academic programs (CHME, BIME, and MECE) that will not meet the updated writing policy requirements. The UWC is not trying to force a change in any current program with these modifications to policy. Rather we are trying to maintain the status quo and prevent any potential erosion of the use of writing in and across the curriculum. The 2 credit hour programmatic writing courses which make up these three programs were approved as WI courses because the manner in which they would be used to meet the WI requirement in each program was not considered as part of their approval. (KGC OE-CHME-491 is the exception to this; it was approved prior to the current committee's participation.)

The UWC recognizes that in the future, new or modified programs may not be able to accommodate a minimum of 3 credit hours of programmatic writing courses while still meeting their other discipline specific curricular requirements. This exception process will allow the UWC to document the rationale for any approved exception and provide it to the registrar's office.

In summary, the proposed policy updates will clarify the requirements of the writing policy, prevent the potential erosion of the use of writing in and across the curriculum, and have no negative impact on any current program. The policy is reinforcing what is essentially the de facto current state of 9 credit hours of WI courses. The revisions allow for those programs not currently meeting the 9 credit hour WI requirement to be grandfathered with no expiration date, requiring no change on their part. An exception process will be developed to accommodate future programs unable to meet this updated requirement. The grading requirement for the policy will be revised to indicate that it is based on individually prepared writing artifacts, even if part of a group written document.