



NORTHERN ILLINOIS

UNIVERSITY

Writing at Northern Illinois University: A Summary

This report is a self-study compiled for consultant-evaluators from the National Council of Writing Program Administrators. They will be invited to visit NIU late in the fall 2000 or early in the spring 2001 semester. The purpose of the report is to provide information that will help the consultant-evaluators assess and make recommendations about improving the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Program at Northern Illinois University. The WAC Program seeks recommendations about how to stabilize WAC, expand its outreach, and carry forward the project of establishing a large, well-equipped and staffed University Writing Center. The Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences has approved and earmarked funds for the visit in the WAC Program's 2000-01 budget. The Provost's Office has asked the WAC coordinator to submit a request for funding the consultant-evaluators' traveling expenses and accommodations.

Section I, *General Background*, notes that NIU faculty do not have a coherent structure of support for WAC. Decentralized efforts to provide tutoring have not reached enough students. A small writing center in the Department of English tutored 1,244 students during the academic year 1998-99, but its facilities and resources are extremely limited. Two graduate assistants have tutored students in economics, history, philosophy, political science, psychology, and sociology. The College of Engineering and Engineering Technology have one tutor who works with students.

The demand is increasing for a centralized facility that helps to develop NIU students' critical thinking through the process of drafting, discussing, and revising their written work. The university's Assessment Services has recently conducted two writing assessment projects whose results indicate the need for the proposed University Writing Center, which would supplement writing instruction and provide resources for ongoing faculty development.

The WAC Program currently promotes writing assessment on the departmental levels, professional training for writing tutors, cross-disciplinary writing courses such as ENGL 250, and dissemination of WAC techniques through workshops, a website, and a WAC newsletter. However, the WAC Program needs to strengthen under-utilized assets, identify impediments to its outreach, evaluate its current goals, assess its proposal for a University Writing Center, and learn what similar institutions have done nationally to create program stability.

Current institutional conditions include a significant change in NIU's administration—a new President, Provost, Associate Provost, Associate Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and other key players who will profoundly affect the WAC Program's development.

The NIU student body consists mainly of people from northern Illinois. Percentages of under-represented groups will increase dramatically in the next few years (65% more Hispanics, 46% more Asian Americans, 8.8% more African Americans; 36% of NIU students are presently over 25). At-risk students have tutoring facilities such as a small ESL Center, the Chance Program, athletic counseling, and the College of Education's Office of Instructional Assistance.

However, the WAC Program's mission is to supplement writing instruction beyond remediation with support that is, in the words of NIU's mission statement, "current, responsive, and of the highest possible quality."

Section II, *Curriculum*, identifies lifelong learning as NIU's philosophical goal. Analytical thought, informed judgment, effective communication, and appreciation for the life of the mind characterize this goal. The WAC Program emphasizes the continued practice of writing as a crucial means by which this goal is realized.

The NIU undergraduate and graduate catalogs list a total of 73 courses that focus on writing in the departments or schools of Allied Health Professions, Communications, Communicative Disorders, English, Foreign Languages and Literatures, Geology, Leadership and Educational Policy Studies, Law, Management, Mathematics, Nursing, Political Science, Physics, Special Education, Technology, and Theatre Arts. Online searches indicate that syllabi in other courses emphasize writing extensively, as well. Many of these syllabi approach writing as a process of information gathering, impromptu response, journaling or log-keeping, drafting, revising, and editing. Textbook choices also reflect that approach. Similar to composition courses, students in some courses receive responses to their written work at points before the time that they turn in a final, polished draft. Criteria for grading written work in some courses are explicit, applied consistently, and specified in the assignments.

In terms of outcomes though, the First-Year Composition Program features the most extensive effort at writing assessment, including placement testing, calibration workshops, and the application of a rubric that establishes specific exit criteria for the grading of students' written performance. The School of Nursing has a portfolio system in place to measure progress in critical thinking before and after completing degree work. But these positive indications of the kind of writing instruction that occurs across the curriculum at NIU do not account for the majority of courses, and successful writing instruction in some courses does not suggest that the same occurs consistently in others.

Section III, *Faculty*, examines the status and conditions of faculty who teach writing in the Department of English as one model for a writing program. Mostly graduate assistants (GAs), Supportive Professional Staff (SPS), and Instructors teach First-Year Composition. They receive ongoing opportunities for professional development in workshops on technology, grading calibration, and pedagogical issues. GAs share office space, have phone and computer access, and teach two sections of writing per semester. GAs who have no teaching experience must also enroll in ENGL 500: Internship in the College Teaching of English. SPS have key instructional specializations and are on continuing contracts with no expectations of research or publication, although they often conduct institutional research as part of their specializations (e.g. administrating assessment projects). SPS have status and conditions that resemble those of professorial faculty. Instructors participate in making program policy, have semi-private office space/computers/phones, receive the same benefits as professorial faculty, and negotiate their conditions through a union. Instructors teach four courses per semester.

Professorial faculty in English teach more advanced writing courses, including technical writing, fiction and poetry, rhetorical analysis, advanced composition, writing pedagogy, and research. Teaching loads are five courses per year.

Similar circumstances exist on a much smaller scale for MGMT 346/347, a multi-section course in the College of Business—but mostly, professorial faculty assume responsibilities for writing instruction in cross-curricular courses. These faculty voluntarily take advantage of the professional development opportunities that the WAC program offers. However, the history and limited growth of WAC at NIU reveals a struggle for sustained financial support. Four changes of leadership in the ten years or so of its existence may explain why the majority of faculty have not taken advantage of its outreach.

If the proposed University Writing Center goes forward, the WAC program will develop a centralized teaching staff of GAs, SPS, and Instructors similar to First-Year Composition. Status and conditions of the faculty in the University Writing Center will also resemble the First Year Composition Program, as will opportunities for professional development, assignment of office space, access to technology, and so forth.

Section IV, *Program Administration*, shows that the structure for the administration of the First Year Composition Program is the most sophisticated and complex of the campus writing programs. It delegates teaching and training responsibilities, schedules courses, and supports faculty as if it were a department. The director of composition supervises all activities and reports both to the chair of the Department of English and the Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

The WAC coordinator works with the director of composition to decide the assignment of GAs and Instructors to the writing center, supervises their ongoing training, and oversees expansion of services. The coordinator also works with SPS who provide specialized assistance in technological development of the writing center. The coordinator has developed and promoted the proposal for the University Writing Center, working with the Associate Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences to gather support for the project. The coordinator reports to the Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Administrators in other programs or quasi-programs report to department chairs and primarily oversee the development of classes. NIU demonstrates a consistent trend of placing writing program administration in the hands of tenured professorial faculty and SPS.

This report ends with a [time-line](#) for arranging the WPA consultant-evaluators' visit, for disseminating the results, and for seeking consequent action.

Writing at Northern Illinois University: A Self-study in Preparation for a Consultation-Evaluation by the Council of Writing Program Administrators

I. General Background

A. Focus of the Visit

1. Current Concerns. This report will focus primarily on concerns related to revitalizing a Writing Across the Curriculum program at Northern Illinois University.

The logical place to begin is the series of courses in writing instruction that take place in the First-Year Composition Program (ENGL 103, 104, and 105). These courses satisfy the six-credit requirement for university-wide competency in writing. Instructors—NIU's term for adjuncts— (25%) and graduate student teaching assistants (75%) provide the primary instruction.

Much evidence suggests that the First-Year Composition Program provides a sound basis for the development of cross-curricular writing skills at NIU (see discussion in "Part II Curriculum," this report). Moreover, numerous sections of 104 and 105 are listed in the course catalogue as partners with disciplinary courses in anthropology, business, chemistry, communication, education, geology, history, philosophy, sociology, and women's studies. Although the courses are only linked by virtue of co-registration, the potential for dialogue with faculty of "partner courses" could be developed, so that these partnerships—known as Focused Interest Groups (FIGs)—could then reinforce the idea that the First-Year Composition Program seeks to bridge the gap between "general" writing instruction and writing in the disciplines.

Ample opportunities for the Instructors' professional development occur through several venues: workshops (e.g. in technology and assessment activities), enrollment in ENGL 500 (the required in-service seminar for new interns), regular observation of new Instructors and graduate teaching assistants (GAs), annual evaluation of course texts, frequent discussion of teachers' grading patterns and syllabi, student evaluations of teaching, and careful examination of Instructors' and interns' credentials prior to appointment. Moreover, the First-Year Composition Program often re-evaluates its three well-established assessment procedures for 1) placement, 2) progress in ENGL 103, and 3) achievement at the end of the ENGL 103-104/105 sequence.

A major problem related to revitalizing WAC is that a small writing center—originally established for First-Year Composition students during the mid-80s—needs significant development. Located in the Department of English in a cramped room with two older-model computers, it cannot provide adequate accommodation for more than three or four student tutorials at any one time. The director (an appointed instructor) during the 1999-2000 academic year reported that 3 Instructors (10 hrs/week), 3 GAs (8 hrs/week), and 6 undergraduate peer tutors (2-12 hrs/week) staffed it.

Tutorials usually last ½ to 1 hour. Although the First-Year Composition writing center tutors many students from ENGL 103 and 104, a larger number of students from other disciplines also visit it. No records indicate whether the students from cross-disciplinary courses were disciplinary majors or merely enrolled in the courses. During the academic year 1998-1999, the breakdown of visits included:

Accounting: 6

Adult Continuing Ed: 4

Allied Health: 6
Anthropology: 22
Art: 6
Biology: 2
Dance Ed: 2
Elementary Ed: 8
Foundations of Ed: 9
Communication Studies: 65
Computer Science: 2
Counseling: 3
Instructional Technology: 17
Economics: 2
English: 531
Physical Ed: 17
Special Ed: 91
Family, Consumer & Nutrition: 33
Finance: 4
History: 35
Interdisciplinary courses: 17
Journalism: 4
Management: 34
Marketing: 18
Math: 2
Music: 1
Nursing: 16
Operations Management & Info: 7
Philosophy: 7
Political Science: 21
Public Administration: 5
Psychology: 12
Reading: 56
Sociology: 53
Spanish: 1
Technology: 3

Other (application letters, dissertations/theses, writing contests,
grant proposals, conference papers, test prep e.g. GMAT/GRE, etc.) 122

TOTAL 1998-1999 VISITS: 1,244

Students with English as Second Language needs visit the writing center repeatedly. In the academic year 1998-1999, 35 ESL students accounted for 234 visits. An ESL center, also in the Department of English, exists for ESL students with more serious writing and reading difficulties. The working relationship between writing center and ESL tutors is very good, but according to writing center tutors, many ESL students still prefer to take their assignments to the writing center.

No tutor-training course has existed in the First-Year Composition writing center for some time, although in 1989 such a course existed. For GAs assigned to the writing center, some training comes from instruction about conferences in ENGL 500: Internship in the College Teaching of English. Undergraduate peer tutors only get training from experience. Students often overwhelm the writing center at the end of the semester, and especially during the last month, many have to line up in the hall and wait—or be turned away. In a university with a fall 1998 enrollment of 22,473 (Office of Institutional Research Data Book, 1), this problem is a source of consternation.

The problem is especially compelling because the writing center, First-Year Composition, and WAC do not define “tutoring in writing” as remediation. Tutoring in writing is an effort to work in collaboration with students to hone their higher-order

writing and reading skills and develop their critical thinking through the process of drafting, discussing, and revising their written work. Many students of all abilities actively seek this kind of tutoring, and many faculty desire it for their students.

Notwithstanding, the “writing center problem” cannot simply be relegated to First-Year Composition—or to the Department of English. Inadequate facilities for tutoring in writing have a bearing on other WAC-related concerns that clearly implicate the interests of the entire university.

Writing takes place in many courses across the NIU curriculum. Faculty who integrate writing in those courses do not all enjoy the same pedagogical support that teachers in First-Year Composition do. The support that exists is fragmented. During the academic year 1999-2000, a WAC consultant (GA in English) formally trained in writing pedagogy provided tutoring for the Economics, History, Political Science, and Sociology Departments—and she has done so for three years, while working on her PhD. 33 students visited her in fall 1999, and 14 of them made multiple visits—adding up to 105 sessions. She also does class presentations and co-facilitates workshops. Another WAC consultant (GA in Psychology), not formally trained in writing pedagogy, worked with students in the Psychology Department while continuing his PhD studies. 54 students visited him in fall 1999. Both consultants are under pressure to finish their degrees, and no one will step into their positions for the academic year 2000-01. The Philosophy Department has a system of “rotating writing tutors”—GAs in philosophy who take turns sharing tutoring responsibilities during each semester. The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences contributes monies to all of these WAC activities.

The College of Engineering and Engineering Technology, on the other hand, has hired its own writing consultant mainly to assist students working on upper-level writing projects.

Writing assessment activities in most disciplines are limited to the grades assigned at the completion of individual courses. The Nursing Program, which uses a writing portfolio to measure progress in critical thinking at the graduate level, is an exception. Thus, many students may graduate without receiving adequate help in developing their writing abilities. In the spring 1999 semester, NIU’s Assessment Services conducted a large-scale pilot project on junior-level writing (using the ACT COMP Writing Essay, comparatively graded by ACT staff using its standardized scoring methods and a local team of readers using a holistic rubric). Results suggested that from the freshman to the junior year, no improvement in writing occurred. The project included 672 juniors from all colleges in the university—e.g. humanities, social sciences, sciences and mathematics, engineering, the arts, education, business, and the health professions. This finding was disconcerting, given the university’s philosophical commitment to competency-based education (see II.A.1, this study).

In relation to the foregoing concerns, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences hired a new coordinator in WAC in 1998. The coordinator’s tenure-line position was assigned to the Department of English. A budget was established to support both the coordinator’s salary and a renewed WAC Program. Historically, NIU has made two previous efforts to institute a WAC Program. A nationally recognized web page remains in evidence of the second effort. The present coordinator must now determine priorities in developing a program that will support all faculty and students in the improvement of students’ writing performance.

2. Changes Being Contemplated. The WAC Program seeks several ways to become part of the university’s infrastructure of pedagogical support. The recently established WAC Advisory Board—composed of representatives from all colleges—believes that professors, instructors, GAs, and students from other colleges and departments would benefit from establishing a larger, differently located, university writing center to provide a much expanded version of the First-Year Composition writing center. The university writing center would be staffed with a core of full-time tutors, GAs, and peer tutors who are all trained specifically to assist students and faculty with writing tasks in a technologically enhanced, cross-disciplinary writing environment.

As a start in that direction, in fall 1999 a tutor was hired in the First-Year Composition writing center to work specifically with students in the College of Business. At the same time, a cadre of GAs who were prepared as tutors in a new seminar, ENGL 600: Training in WAC, will work as writing fellows in the writing center, linking up with specific courses in various disciplines for the next academic year. A research project will evaluate the improvement tutoring facilitates on writing assignments that students from the linked courses bring to writing center tutorials.

The administration of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences has helped the WAC coordinator seek support for the university writing center from the Division of Finance and Facilities, the Office of Sponsored Projects, the Council of Deans, and the Provost. Locations for the proposed writing center have been discussed with the University Libraries and Student Housing. Student Housing has offered space in a dormitory on the west side of campus that seems especially appropriate, given the campus commitment to a living/learning connection. Indeed, some tutorial services already exist in the dormitories, and a university writing center would work in close coordination with them. Student Housing directors and planners helped the WAC coordinator to design the proposed facility. The Provost and the Academic Planning Council approved a proposal to seek state funding for the university writing center in April 2000. A Capital Improvement document approving the project was signed in June 2000. A Program Priorities Request was sent to the Illinois Board of Higher Education in July 2000.

The Office of Faculty Development and Instructional Design, the Office of Teaching Assistant Training and Development, and the WAC coordinator are co-organizing university-wide workshops. Eventually, all three entities might create a more formal coalition for planning yearly events.

A close alliance with the university's Office of Assessment Services may enable the WAC Program to collaborate with various departments and colleges that seek effective, systematic methods to assess and strengthen the writing components of their degree programs. For instance, the university assessment coordinator, the assistant director of the First-Year Composition Program, and the WAC coordinator conducted a series of interviews with faculty from various departments to see what kind of prompt might be designed for another university-wide writing assessment in late spring 2000. The assistant director of First-Year Composition worked with Rhetoric and Composition faculty to design the prompt and later assess the exam. The aim was to compare results with those that the ACT COMP exam produced the previous year. This project could lead toward developing a university-wide assessment tool—e.g. a “rising junior” portfolio or a junior-level proficiency exam. Currently, the project is also leading toward writing assessment—with trained and experienced First-Year Composition faculty as raters—in departments that are under review.

As one instance of the perceived need and interest in junior-level writing assessment, the Department of Management is seeking a way to measure the writing competency of majors entering the College of Business. Talks between the WAC Program and faculty who teach MGMT 346: Business Communication may result in a pilot assessment project in coordination with the writing center's research project.

The WAC Program hopes to set up a Certificate of Graduate Study in the Teaching of Writing” for graduate students in various disciplines.

The WAC Program seeks to recruit graduate students from across the disciplines for ENGL 600. GAs who take the course may eventually have an opportunity to teach ENGL 250: Practical Writing or a course such as MGMT 346. Because of the need for more writing instruction beyond First-Year Composition, the Department of English is redesigning ENGL 250 to address writing in the disciplines and professions. The Department of English may eventually propose that a renamed, redesigned ENGL 250 become an interdisciplinary listing in General Education.

In the same context, the WAC Advisory Board and the WAC Program also hope to promote a “writing-intensive” designation, yet to be determined, for courses. A writing-intensive designation would lead toward the goal of requiring students to enroll in a writing or writing-intensive course for each of their undergraduate years. Faculty willing to adapt to the writing-intensive designation could perhaps earn reassigned time after they had taught a certain number of such courses, and they would have reduced enrollment in those courses.

Projects with local schools and two-year colleges (e.g. internships in writing consultancy) may also appear on the WAC Program's agenda as training expands.

As other, more pressing priorities get addressed, maintenance of the WAC web page will continue, with the addition of links for the WAC newsletter. The newsletter recently expanded its readership from four departments in the social sciences in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences to the entire university and is published twice a semester.

3. Issues to Be Addressed by WPA Consultant-Evaluators. First, Consultant-Evaluators could indicate existing strengths or assets that the WAC Program is under-utilizing, but might develop in terms of improving writing instruction beyond the

strongly supported First-Year Composition Program. For example, it would be especially helpful to receive recommendations on how to assess the overall impact and WAC-related potential of the First-Year Composition Program's contribution to FIGs (involving ENGL 104) and how to assess the Program's burgeoning links between technology and writing.

Second: Consultant-Evaluators could identify potential issues or problems the WAC Program has not anticipated, based again on what they know of other institutions. For example, where could writing specialists most strategically serve on university committees and other governing bodies?

Third, Consultant-Evaluators could examine how the WAC Program might achieve the stability and longevity that other institutions have. For example, what role does a well-defined designation of "writing-intensive" courses play? What form might a systematic college-wide or university-wide writing assessment take? What programs of WAC training exist in other institutions, and what roles do Master's and PhD programs in Rhetoric and Composition play?

Fourth, Consultant-Evaluators could examine the WAC Program's proposal for locating and developing a university writing center, to provide advice about the feasibility of the plans and the best use of existing sources. Moreover, the Consultant-Evaluators might offer suggestions for obtaining funding and support, based on what they know about other institutions' writing centers.

Above all, the Consultant-Evaluators could use their knowledge of comparable institutions to help advise the WAC Program how to strengthen its goal of providing the best opportunities for competency-based education by establishing a University Writing Program, based on the synergy between First-Year Composition and WAC.

B. Current Institutional Conditions

1. Institutional changes affecting writing at NIU. A search for a new university President succeeded in hiring a candidate during the spring 2000 semester. A search for a new Provost is under way. The Associate Provost for Resource Planning has retired, and the search for his successor continues. The Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences was recently named to the position of interim Associate Provost, and a search for a new Associate Provost will proceed when the new Provost is in place. These administrators will have a profound influence on the institutional status of writing (e.g. writing assessment, initiatives, the university writing center project).

Like the WAC Program, the revitalized Office of Faculty Development and Instructional Design and the newly established Office of Teaching Assistant Training and Development reflect the university's growing support of pedagogy.

Some university departments are undergoing significant transformations because of retirements. The Department of English, for example, has nine new faculty members as of fall 2000.

Technology has taken an increasingly prominent role in university-wide teaching. The First-Year Composition Program has been fully computer mediated since 1994. The Department of English developed a technology-related SPS (Supportive Professional Staff) position in 1997. This SPS specialist has designed and established an online writing environment for First-Year Composition and English faculty, as well as a training program of technology consultants among English graduate students. Such an online writing environment has the potential to transform practices in writing instruction for all GAs and faculty on campus (particularly if it is made available through a university writing center). A new Rhetoric and Composition faculty member with specialization in writing with technology has been hired in the Department of English. He will influence the First-Year Composition Program, and no doubt to a significant degree, the WAC Program in the future.

2. Characteristics of the student body. According to the NIU Office of Institutional Research Data Book for 1998, 73% of the student population came from Chicago and the surrounding suburbs. 20% came from counties near DeKalb, 4% from other areas of Illinois, 2% from other states, and 1% were international. Median freshman age was 18.5. 2,831 freshmen enrolled, along with 2,310 transfers (the majority of the latter having completed core-competency in writing elsewhere). Total undergraduate enrollment was 16,341. Approximately 11% of all undergraduates were African-American, 6% Hispanic, 6.5% Asian, 75% white, and the remaining 1.5% either Native American or non-resident alien. Women accounted for 54% of undergraduate enrollments. Significant increases in numbers of under-represented groups are expected. From the period of

1994 to 2005, the NIU Office of Institutional Research projects increases of 64.8% among populations of Hispanic high school seniors, 45.6% among Asian Americans, and 8.8% among African Americans. 36% of NIU students are presently over 25.

The mean NIU ACT composite score was 21.8, and the mean high school rank was 65.7 (11% of the enrolling freshmen were in the top 10% of their high school classes, 33.7 were in the top 25%, and 83.5 were in the top 50%). Approximately 75% of freshmen have returned after one year, and four-year retention reached 30% in 1994, compared to 18% in 1987. Research shows that 50% of retained students took six years to graduate in 1991-92. A range of 50-57% of those retained took six years to graduate between 1987 and 1990.

“Remediation” is addressed through a number of services.

NIU sponsors the CHANCE program for at-risk students who demonstrate strong motivation and potential for success in college, but who do not meet one or more of the traditional criteria for admission. These students usually go into the developmental Rhetoric and Composition courses, which are designed according to the “stretch-course” model, extending study from a semester to a full year. In 1998, 481 students were enrolled through CHANCE, and in 1999, 501.

Support for at-risk student athletes comes from the Education and Services Program, which provides academic counseling for athletes and is separate from Intercollegiate Athletics.

The Office of Instructional Assistance in the College of Education also helps at-risk students planning to become future teachers by offering assistance in preparing for the Pre-Professional Skills Test and the Basic Skills Test for Illinois certification.

For the fall 1999 semester, a total of 2,390 students enrolled in ENGL 103, earning a mean grade point average of 2.704. 526 students enrolled in ENGL 104, earning a mean grade point average of 2.475. 223 students enrolled in ENGL 105, earning a mean grade point average of 2.959.

C. Missions

1. Mission of the university. As abbreviated from the Undergraduate Catalogue 1999-2000, “The central mission of the university is the transmission, expansion, and application of knowledge through teaching, research and artistry, and public service. In fulfilling that mission, Northern Illinois University meets the needs of students for liberal, professional, technical, and lifelong education.... The multiple and ever-changing demands of society require the continuing development of academic and professional programs that are current, responsive, and of the highest possible quality.... Convinced that the intellectual resources of the nation are held in common, the university hopes to maintain access for all segments of the population, and, within the constraints of its budget, intends to admit those who can meet its entrance standards, to retain those who can benefit from its programs, and to educate students to the extent of their capabilities and desires” (8).

2. Mission of the writing program. Currently, the First-Year Composition Program has provided the foundation mission statement upon which the WAC Program seeks to build. A 1998-99 report states: “Unlike other courses in the English major which introduce students to the history and forms of English language and to British and American literature or which ask students to write in the discourse of the discipline, Rhetoric and Composition [the 103, 104/105 sequence] is designed to make students think seriously about the nature of critical reading and writing required for success in the academic arena generally and to practice this writing routinely” (Resubmission of Courses of General Education Credit 1).

The WAC Program’s addendum to, and departure from, this mission is that WAC’s outreach must be designed to help university administration, faculty, and staff—as well as students—to think seriously about the nature of writing and to promote the routine practice of writing in the discourse of each discipline. WAC thus advocates writing as an appropriate pedagogical component of most course offerings in the undergraduate and graduate curriculum. More broadly stated, WAC’s mission is to support faculty in finding effective ways to strike a balance between the practices of writing and critical reading as alternatives to the more common method of lecturing, so that faculty can engage students as frequently as possible in active learning.

3. How the missions of the First-Year Composition Program and WAC support the mission of the university. The missions of First-Year Composition and WAC have more to do with the expansion, the application, and the making of knowledge than with the mere transmission of it. This is the point at which the continuing development of First-Year Composition and WAC may be deemed as “current, responsive, and of the highest possible quality” (see mission of the university, above)—basing that development upon the advances of the last thirty years of research in composition studies. As such, the missions of First-Year Composition and WAC support the mission of the university in a more progressive than traditional sense, in terms of teaching, research and artistry, and public service.

II. Curriculum

A. *Philosophy and Goals*

1. Philosophy and goals of the university. As abbreviated from the Undergraduate Catalogue 1999-2000, “The university believes that the quality of individual and social life depends on the quality of mind; and it commits itself to preparing students for effective, responsible, and articulate membership in the complex society in which they live as well as in their chosen professions or occupations.

“Recognizing that students will need to learn throughout their lives, the university provides them with the opportunity to become more competent in analytical thought, informed judgment, and effective communication and to develop an appreciation for the life of the mind” (8).

2. Philosophy and goals of First-Year Composition and WAC at NIU. In resonance with the university, the First-Year Composition Program states its philosophy and goals in the following terms: “The objectives for student learning in Rhetoric and Composition ask students to read, think, and write critically about the different modes of narrative, descriptive, analytical, and persuasive discourse. Typical students in their freshman year will write expressive essays drawing on the people, places, and events of their past. They will write public essays that analyze or argue some subject of contemporary social concern. They will examine the academic writing of specialists in a variety of fields and will write professional essays that document this discourse and take positions relative to its terms of analysis and debate. In order to produce such writing well, first-year students must recognize many things: the modes of describing and storytelling, the rhetorical terms of analysis, the forms of effective argumentation, the qualities of forceful style, the nature of audience awareness, the mechanics and grammatical features of conventional English, the different disciplinary expectations of academic discourse, the standard rules of professional documentation. They must understand the recursive process of writing, from invention to drafting to revision, and they must write regularly and often to develop writing as both a skill and a habit.”

The WAC Program would emphasize its philosophy and goals in parallel terms. The objectives of writing to learn and learning to write require students to continue to read, think, and write critically, recognizing that the principles of argumentation and persuasion underpin most academic discourse, regardless of the discipline or topic. Students will examine the academic writing of specialists in a variety of fields and will write in the expected forms and conventions of those fields, heeding the documentation practices that those different fields favor.

To write well, students must recognize that in different disciplinary contexts, they cannot over-generalize modes of conveying information, interpretation, analysis and synthesis, style, audience awareness, organization and format—e.g. good writing in a belletristic essay for English is often inappropriate writing in an executive summary for business or a lab report for biology. However, good academic writing commonly shares the foregoing rhetorical features and the specific applications of these features can be learned in each discipline. Throughout their academic and professional lives, students must therefore remain attentive to the recursive process of writing, to understand that invention, drafting, and revising are essential habits all professionals practice in order to master the prose that characterizes various areas of specialization.

3. How First-Year Composition and WAC convey their philosophy and goals to teachers, students, and appropriate administrators. First-Year Composition conveys its philosophy and goals to the appropriate administrators through resubmission of ENGL 103, 104, and 105 to the General Education Committee every five years, through meetings with departmental/college/university committees, and through yearly reports to the Department of English and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. It conveys the same to teachers through systematic training of graduate interns in ENGL 500, through

distributing the program document “Goals of Freshman Rhetoric and Composition,” through a First-Year Composition web page, and through the practices in supervision and professional development described in section A.1, this self-study. The teachers convey the philosophy and goals to students through distribution of their syllabi, through practice of the pedagogies that reflect the process of writing, and through the evaluation of the forms and functions of student writing that the First-Year Composition “Goals” document delineates.

During the academic year 1999-2000, the re-emerging WAC Program conveyed its developing philosophy and goals to appropriate administrators (e.g. the director of composition, the chair of the Department of English, the Associate Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences) through frequent reports on WAC activity and through continuing research on and participation in plans for the university writing center proposal. It conveyed the same to teachers through workshops and discussions, through informal consultation, through meetings of the newly formed WAC Advisory Board, through the WAC newsletter, through grants of \$1000 to sponsor individual faculty projects that integrate writing in the curriculum, through departmental and university publications, and through meetings with university committees. It conveyed its philosophy and goals to graduate students through ENGL 600, and to undergraduate students through ENGL 250. It also conveyed as much to students through the tutoring activities of the writing center and the WAC consultants. Hopefully, WAC can also lay a very modest claim to conveying its philosophy and goals to students through the teachers whose interest in integrating writing in their courses was renewed by the activities described in this paragraph.

As mentioned, a well-developed web page also conveys the philosophy and goals of the program to anyone who accesses it. Ironically, though in need of updating, the web page is better known nationally than locally as a resource.

B. Courses and syllabi

1. Writing Courses Currently Taught at NIU. The two-course sequence (ENGL 103, 104) in First-Year Composition accounts for writing instruction at the 100-level (commonly associated with the first year of matriculation for traditional students). Below is a list of courses from the Undergraduate Catalog 1999-2000 and the Graduate Catalog 2000-01 in which a concentrated practice in writing is a principal focus, according to specific course descriptions. Courses in writing pedagogy are included. Some courses may have been inadvertently left off this list because the catalog descriptions didn’t specify the centrality of writing or writing pedagogy in so many words. Master’s Thesis and PhD Dissertation credit are also omitted—partly because such a capstone project is common to nearly every advanced degree (although other options occur)—but undergraduate theses seemed important to mention for the statement they make about demonstrating a mastery of disciplinary writing before moving on to advanced degree work or to writing in the professions.

It also seems important to mention a healthy number of courses that do not fall under the category of a “writing course.” Notwithstanding, these courses demonstrate such a strong pedagogical focus on writing to learn and learning to write that they provide exemplars for what a definition of “writing intensive” might be. Fall 1999 discussions with particular faculty and spring 2000 explorations of web-posted syllabi have yielded such writing-intensive exemplars as SOCI 473: Sociological Theory, HIST 260: American History to 1865, COMS 356: Critical Interpretation of Film/Television, POLS 285: Problems of International Relations, MKTG 443: Principles of Marketing Research, UEET 101: Introduction to Engineering, AHP 201: Social and Individual Patterns of Drug Use, ART 282: Introduction to the Visual Arts, CIEE 344: Teaching Science in the Elementary School, CIRE 350: Effective Elementary Reading Instruction.

The development of some of these courses may well have been influenced by past or present contact with WAC activities and support at NIU, or by professors’ independent investigations of writing pedagogies in their disciplines, or by departmental emphases on writing pedagogies. In any case, the university’s cross-disciplinary “writing culture” extends beyond what the courses listed below may indicate. Moreover, the fine integration of writing activities occurring in some courses not specifically identified as writing courses suggests that establishing a designation of “writing-intensive” would be a promising undertaking. Just so, a system of rewards for faculty who teach such courses and an indication of credit for students enrolling in them might accomplish a great deal in helping the administration to demonstrate exactly how competency-based education is defined and what “value-added” features it manifests.

Please note: the following list of courses does not necessarily imply a correlation between the number and the year of matriculation (e.g. a 300-level course is not automatically a junior-level course). Neither does the number necessarily correspond with level of difficulty (e.g. a 400-level course is not automatically harder than a 300-level course).

At the 200 level:

Department of Special Education EPSE 250: Professional Writing for Special Educators (1 cr)
Department of Communication JOUR 200: Basic News Writing (3 cr)
Department of English ENGL 250: Practical Writing (3 cr)

At the 300 level:

Department of Management MGMT 346: Business Communication (3 cr)
“ “ MGMT 347: Business Writing for Accountants (1 cr/module, up to 3 cr)

Department of Communication COMS 300: Speech Writing (3 cr)
“ “ COMS 355: Media Writing (3 cr)
“ “ JOUR 301: Article Writing (3 cr)
“ “ JOUR 355: TV News Writing and Reporting (3 cr)
“ “ JOUR 360: Public Relations Writing (3 cr)

Department of English ENGL 300: Advanced Essay Composition (3 cr)
“ “ ENGL 301: Writing Poetry I (3 cr)
“ “ ENGL 302: Writing Fiction I (3 cr)
“ “ ENGL 303: Writing Creative Non-Fiction (3 cr)
“ “ ENGL 304: Writing Arts Criticism (3 cr)
“ “ ENGL 308: Technical Writing (3 cr)
“ “ ENGL 398: Topics in Practice and Theory of Composition (3 cr)

Department of Foreign Languages
& Literatures FLFR 301, 302: Advanced French Grammar and Composition (each 3 cr)
“ “ FLIT 301, 302: Advanced Italian Grammar and Composition (each 3 cr)
“ “ FLGE 301, 302: Advanced German Grammar and Composition (each 3 cr)
“ “ FLRU 301: Advanced Russian Grammar and Composition (3 cr)
“ “ FLRU 311: Russian Conversation and Composition (3 cr)

Department of Political Science POLS 397H: Honors Seminar in Political Science (3 cr)

At the 400 level:

School of Allied Health Professions AHPH 495: Funding for Programs in Community Health (3 cr)

Department of Communication COMS 466: Narrative Scriptwriting (3 cr)
“ “ COMS 467: Corporate Scriptwriting (3 cr)
“ “ JOUR 401: Interpretative & Opinion Writing (3 cr)
“ “ JOUR 460: Specialized Press Writing (3 cr)

Department of Communicative Disorders COMD 491: Microcomputer Uses in Communicative Disorders (3 cr)

Department of English ENGL 401: Writing Poetry II (3 cr)
“ “ ENGL 402: Writing Fiction II (3 cr)
“ “ ENGL 403: Technical Editing (3 cr)
“ “ ENGL 404: The Teaching of Writing (3 cr)
“ “ ENGL 424: Topics in Technical Writing (3 cr)
“ “ ENGL 451, 452, 453: ESL Rhetoric and Composition I, II, III (each 3 cr)
“ “ ENGL 480: Materials and Methods of Teaching English in the Middle and High School (3 cr)

“ “ ENGL 495: Practicum in English (3 cr)
“ “ ENGL 496: Internship in Writing, Editing, or Training (3 cr)

Department of Foreign Languages

& Literatures FLFR 411: Advanced Composition in French (3 cr)
“ “ FLSP 411: Advanced Composition in Spanish (3 cr)

Department of Geology GEO 498, 499: Senior Thesis & Honors Thesis (1-3 cr, max 6)

Department of Leadership & Educational Policy Studies LEIT 455: Media Design Techniques (3 cr)

Department of Physics PHYS 498: Senior Seminar (1 cr)

“ “ PHYS 499H: Honors Seminar in Physics (3 cr)

Department of Political Science POLS 49H: Senior Honors Thesis (1-3 cr)

Department of Technology TECH 408: Industrial Conference & Meeting Management (3 cr)

School of Theatre Arts THEA 481: Playwriting 1 (3 cr)

“ “ THEA 482: Playwriting Studio (3 cr)

At the 500 level:

Department of Leadership & Educational Policy Studies LEIT 511: Advanced Instructional Media Design (3 cr)

School of Nursing NURS 532: Practicum in Nursing Research (3 cr)

Department of Communication COMS 547: Communication Technology (3 cr)

JOUR 502: Reporting of Public Affairs (3 cr)

Department of English ENGL 500: Internship in the College Teaching of English (3 cr)

“ “ ENGL 503: Traditions in Written Rhetoric (3 cr)

“ “ ENGL 509: Creative Writing (3 cr)

“ “ ENGL 524: Professional Writing Institute (1-6 cr)

“ “ ENGL 526: Technical Writing (3 cr)

“ “ ENGL 527: Technical Editing (3 cr)

“ “ ENGL 528: Internship in Technical Writing or Editing (3 cr)

“ “ ENGL 532: Writing for Electronic Media (3 cr)

“ “ ENGL 547: The Teaching of Writing in Secondary Schools (3 cr)

Department of Mathematics MATH 511: Introduction to Mathematics Educational Research
(3 cr)

Department of Political Science POLS 599: Public Sector Research (3 cr)

College of Law LAW 500, 501: Legal Writing and Advocacy (2 cr, 2 cr)

At the 600 level and above:

Department of English ENGL 600: Training in WAC (special topic in teaching college English 3 cr)
“ “ ENGL 603: Seminar in Rhetorical Studies (3 cr)
Department of Management MGMT 630: Professional Business Communication (2 cr)

Department of Special Education ESPE 670: Writing for Publication in Educational Psychology
and Special Education (3 cr)
“ “ ESPE 671: Writing Grant Proposals in Education (3 cr)

College of Law LAW 675: Public Interest Litigation (3 cr)
“ “ LAW 727: Appellate Advocacy (3 cr)
“ “ LAW 801: Judicial Externship Program (3 cr)
“ “ LAW 802: Appellate Defender Clinic (3 cr)

2. Tentative Observations about Writing Courses Across the Curriculum at NIU. The three writing courses at the 200 level appear to be slanted toward introducing students to basic rhetorical elements of disciplinary writing, as are MGMT 346 & 347. Other writing courses seem to slant toward guiding students through much more specialized features of written discourse within disciplinary areas. Often, it seems that the more specialized writing courses are strategically placed in the curriculum so that students will have acquired a sufficient “knowledge base” in the discipline, from which to draw conceptually when they are asked to write. Writing courses are sometimes required (e.g. EPSE 250, MGMT 346 & 347, LAW 500 & 501) and sometimes left up to the students’ discretion and/or advising (e.g. ENGL 250, JOUR 360, EPSE 670). The only writing courses that seem to identify basic writers and their special needs are the “P” sections in Rhetoric and Composition (ENGL 103), the cross-disciplinary ESL Rhetoric and Composition courses for ESL graduate students (ENGL 451, 452, & 453), and MGMT 347 (one “module” of this 3-credit course is for basic instruction).

3. An overview of sample writing courses and syllabi. It is beyond practicability and the scope of this self-study to provide an overview of every syllabus of every writing course mentioned in section B.1 above. However, sketches of ENGL 103 to 105 and ENGL 250 can suggest some pedagogical principles that the WAC program advocates and seeks to support wherever possible.

The document “Goals of Freshman Rhetoric and Composition”—a product of collaboration among the director of composition and the members of the First-Year Composition Committee—provides guidelines for teachers of ENGL 103, 104, and 105 sections. The goals document suggests that thematic readings, rhetorical concerns, and critical thinking strategies all represent valid ways to organize the courses. From these guidelines, faculty construct their own syllabi and assignments. A set of assignments and exercises also exists on a web page, however, so that GAs and more experienced Instructors can draw from this bank of writing prompts. The First-Year Composition web page thus provides another means of promoting coherence without enforcing uniformity. Moreover, even though the director of composition gives teachers much latitude, common agreements exist about designing the courses. ENGL 103 syllabi generally reflect a concern with personal connections to topics and “expressive” writing, while a progression from expressive to expository and persuasive writing is also expected. Put another way, faculty design their ENGL 103 syllabi to reflect movement from personal to public to professional writing. ENGL 104 syllabi focus on student writers making the transition toward investigative, argumentative, and analytical methods of writing, with an emphasis on the process of research and production of documented essays. ENGL 105 syllabi tend to compress the goals of ENGL 103 and 104, and students only place in this course if they perform very well on the English Core Competency Examination that the First-Year Composition Program administers each spring and summer.

Rhetoric and Composition sections typically require three to four multiply drafted essays. Several shorter papers might serve as “stages” of the longer essays. Teachers often require a journal or web board posting of daily to weekly entries and numerous writing exercises in class. Midterm and final essay exams are common. Reading assignments may range from shorter essays and selections of fiction of the type found in first-year composition readers to full-length novels or works of non-fiction. Reading instruction may range from lecture-discussion to discussions of a text. Often the approach to reading will include rhetorical analysis. Written reading responses are another feature of reading instruction in these courses. Finally, students also receive instruction in reading their own—or peers’ drafts—to analyze the effective application of rhetorical features and conventions of grammatical usage.