

Writing Across the Curriculum: 2018-19 Summary of Progress in Assessing Writing Level-1 Courses

The following paragraphs are taken from our 2017-18 Assessment Summary, though we include them here because they remain true and offer helpful context for our progress this year:

Given that the English Department teaches the entirety of the Writing Level-1 (W1) courses, the assessment plan for W1 neatly aligns with the English Department's own practices in assessing its courses and in making modifications based on data gathered through these assessments.

In recent years, the English department has benefited from a Mellon grant to consider new forms of writing pedagogy. In 2016-17, English department faculty extended these conversations by drafting a new rubric to guide course development and assess student learning in W1 courses. In 2017-18, faculty members beta-tested the rubric in their classes in different forms; several of us have used it to directly assess student learning in English 110 and 200-level courses and have incorporated it into our course learning goals; one of us has also had students directly assess their own learning to the rubric as well.

According to our 2017-18 Summary of Progress, we anticipated that we would refine our rubric in accordance with demonstrated weaknesses of assessment (honing it as a tool for precise reflection on students' progress). Here's what we've accomplished, including and extending this goal:

Student Assessment Plan

- 1) We have polished our learning goals rubric and distributed it to all instructors of W1 courses (English 110 and English 200-level [with the exception of ENGL 297, Literary Analysis, which doesn't bear W1 credit]). We have distributed this rubric to our students as an indication of our semester-long goals for each student.
- 2) To each student course evaluation of a W1 class offered in Spring 2019, we have added one qualitative and one quantitative question, so as to gather data that reflects a student's own self-perception of how the class impacted each student's writing capacity. The questions are as follows:
 - 1) This course has improved my ability to write essays. [Likert scale]
 - 2) Please comment on how this course has improved your writing and your process, and on what aspects of writing and the process you wish had received more attention. Be specific.
- 3) We are currently in the post-semester process of gathering data that's based directly on the rubric built around our learning goals. Instructors of W1 courses are completing this rubric for the course as a whole (determining how many students are at which level for which goal), such that we have quantitative data by which to frame our conversations as an English department during our annual retreat.

Action Plan

- 1) **Evaluation of Gathered Data:** We will bring together a) the data gathered *from students* (via course evaluation) as to how a W1 course impacted their writing ability, and b) the data gathered *from faculty* as to how students were faring in these courses. This pairing of data allows us to read students' self-perception of writing ability alongside faculty's assessment of students' writing ability. During our annual English departmental retreat, we will thus be able to make preliminary claims as to our strengths and weaknesses as a department in the instruction of writing (i.e. are students more or less confident than they should be? Do students' assessments of their writing ability match those of faculty's assessment of students' writing ability? Which aspects of our W1 learning goals seem hardest, according to faculty, for students to attain? Which are we achieving more readily? Which of our learning goals do students mention in their open-ended question?). Addressing these questions allows us a clearer picture as to where we ought to direct our future attention in strengthening our pedagogy.
- 2) **Pedagogical Training in accordance with need:** Toward this end of improving our teaching, we have received a Mellon Departmental Initiative Grant for an accomplished scholar of writing pedagogy to visit Hendrix and offer a workshop in teaching underprepared first-year students. We are excited that, by the time of this scholar's visit in the 2019-20 school year, we will have more substantive data (as described in the previous steps) as to our concrete strengths and weaknesses, as applicable to a) what our students need, and b) gaps in our current pedagogy. This data will help us to ask sharper questions and gain more precise knowledge in the areas that we most need.

We remain passionately committed to strengthening the writing capacity of all students, and we work to assess and modify our practices in accordance with what students need and how students learn.

Assessment Request to W2 Committee

As members of the current W2 Committee, you are certainly aware that the W2 capacity requirement has been in standby mode for several years as the English Department has focused on several scenarios for improving the W1 capacity requirement. Now that the English Department has taken ownership of W1 coded courses and has plans for the assessing student learning goals in W1 coded courses, the Committee on Faculty believes it is time to start a process for updating the W2 capacity requirement. We believe that your committee rather than the English Department should take the lead in this endeavor.

We think the timing is particularly important considering the Higher Learning Commission visit in mid-spring. While this project does not need to be completed before the visit, we believe that it is critical that a plan for reviewing the W2 capacity requirement be in progress when they visit.

We suggest a process that would include the following three different components:

- Gathering suggestions and comments from faculty—and perhaps students—concerning their opinions about what is working and what is not working with the current W2 requirement.
- Consideration of recommendations in the structures and management of the W2 requirement as regards the current campus focus on reducing complexities in the curriculum and as regards current campus staffing issues. [This refers, in part, to the Faculty Handbook language under “Academic Policies for W2 courses” and “W2 Course Designation and Approval Process.”]
- Consideration of the goals and academic structure of the W2 requirement. [This refers, in part, to the Faculty Handbook language under the list of 1989 guidelines and the sections titled “Learning Outcomes for W2 courses” and “The Portfolio in W2 courses.”]

CoF asks the W2 committee to begin meeting with me to accomplish the following committee charges:

- Plan to complete the first item listed above by the end of the current academic year.
- Decide whether or not there are any immediate changes that should be made.
- Recommend a process for accomplishing the second two items above within the following academic year.

Assessment Report - W2

These are the features of the W2 program that will be updated and studied over the next academic year.

- Clarify the requirements for a faculty member to teach a W2 coded course.
 - Should any faculty member be able to teach W2 courses?
- Clarify the appropriate level for W2 coded courses.
 - Should students take W2 coded courses only after completing the W1 requirement?
 - Should the only W2 coded course in a department be the senior capstone course or a course taken in the senior year?
- Clarify the relationship between W2 coded courses and the major.
 - Should students have one or more options to complete a W2 coded course?
 - Should students be required to complete a W2 coded course within the student's major discipline?
- Clarify the structure of W2 course coding and grading.
 - Should W2 completion be automatic upon completing a W2 coded course? If so, should a grade of **C** or higher continue?
 - Should W2 completion be built into the structure of the course for all students?
 - Should W2 courses have enrollment limits?
 - Should W2 continue to require completion at Hendrix?
- Clarify the learning goals for W2 courses and make certain they are measurable.
- Develop an assessment plan for W2 courses.
- Clarify and update the 1989 Guidelines.
 - Guidelines should be clear and concise.
 - Guidelines should be consistent with learning goals and policies.
 - Current contradictions should be corrected. ["substantial length" vs. "mathematical proofs."]
- Clarify the role of the portfolio.
 - The intent seems to be to prove focus on revision.
 - Is the portfolio "real" or is it a metaphor?
 - Role should match guidelines.
- Clarify the Title.
 - Rather than refer to a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) committee, is Writing Capacity Requirements a more appropriate name.