

HENDRIX COLLEGE

TO: Department Chairs
Hendrix College Faculty

FROM: Alice Hines, Writing Program



DATE: August 8, 2000

SUBJECT: The College Writing Requirement

As you continue to revise your departmental offerings, I invite your attention to the following concerns as they relate to the College's Writing Program. I will begin by noting the reviewer's comments because they frame the concerns I raise in this communication. (Dr. David W. Chapman, former Director of the Writing Across the Curriculum Program at Samford University and the Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences at Samford University, conducted a review of the Hendrix College Writing Across the Curriculum Program during his January 18-19, 1999 visit to our campus.)

Dr. Chapman made the following observations about our program:

"The current writing program requires students to be certified at two levels. The first level stresses basic writing skills and is normally completed during the first year. The second level incorporates advanced writing skills and discipline-specific rhetorical concerns, and is normally completed at the sophomore or junior level. The two-tiered approach is a progressive model for WAC programs because it encourages all faculty to assume responsibility for the development of student writing. It also ensures that students will continue to write throughout their undergraduate experience." (Review, January 21, 1999)

"The current structure of the WAC program is theoretically sound and is meeting the needs of most students. The greatest needs are to simplify some of the . . . structure, provide . . . support in order to improve and expand the program, and to reward the efforts of those who have committed themselves to one of the most important tasks of the university-- to produce intelligent, thoughtful writers who effectively communicate in the world." (Review, January 21, 1999)

A) **CONCERN:** *Lack of clear WI requirements on syllabi.*

SUGGESTION: On your syllabus, please list the number of writing assignments, requirements for successful completion of those assignments, weight given each assignment, opportunities for student revision, procedures for providing student feedback, and suggestions or requirements for using the Writing Center.

B) *CONCERN: Too many of our students complete two or more WI courses only to make numerous grammatical, usage, and organization mistakes in other courses.*

SUGGESTIONS:

- a) Consider developing a freshman level discipline-specific writing seminar for your majors. Such a course should emphasize writing skills necessary for successful completion of upper-level course work at the College and within the major. Situating the course within your department or area would permit selection of readings from within your discipline, and paper topics would grow from student exploration of related topics.
- b) Consider making WI credit for your courses integral rather than optional. Require that at least 40% of the grade for a WI course be tied to written work and refuse to accept assignments that do not meet minimal standards; a passing grade should reflect at least adequate performance in writing. For example, our students should show that they know how to use an apostrophe, how to make subjects and verbs agree, how to organize ideas, and so forth. Please refer to "Expectations For The Writing Intensive Courses."

C) *CONCERN: Too many students take WI courses outside the area of the major.*

SUGGESTION: Consider requiring your majors to take at least one WI course in the major. This would move students toward a mastery of discipline-specific writing requirements within the major.

D) *CONCERN: Faculty have too little time to "coach" the writing process.*

SUGGESTION: Now that we have a "Coordinator of Academic Services," we should be able to develop a "Writing Fellows" program. These Fellows would be students who have taken the WI course you offer and have excelled in the writing requirements. They would hold conferences with students about their writing assignments, serve as student liaisons with the faculty, and provide preliminary review of student submissions to ensure that all formal requirements of the assignment have been met. (I made this recommendation eight (8) years ago; I believe the Dean now has the money to move forward with it; I'll keep you informed of our progress).

E) *CONCERN: Faculty members do not submit WI completions to the Registrar or Writing Coordinator on time. When lists are submitted, they often contain the names of students who have not completed the LEVEL I requirement.*

SUGGESTION: Mark Burton has successfully streamlined the reporting process, but faculty members must certify that students have completed WI course requirements. PLEASE send Mark your list(s) as soon as you have completed your term grades. Please remember: a student may not receive credit for a

WI course until he or she has completed the LEVEL I requirement. *STUDENTS DO NOT RECEIVE BOTH LEVEL I AND LEVEL II CREDIT IN THE SAME TERM.*

F) *CONCERN: Faculty members submit "Incomplete" grades for students in WI courses but give the students WI credit.*

SUGGESTION: Please discontinue this practice. Students should receive WI credit only after successful completion of the WI course.

We have a reasonably effective program because you have worked to make it so. However, we know the program does not work as well as it should. As we move to the new calendar with its new curriculum, I ask that you consider and respond to the concerns identified in this memorandum.

If I need to offer additional explanations or provide clarification of any point I have made in this memorandum, please call me.