

Committee on Educational Policies and Planning (CEPP)

Motion

Faculty Meeting - February 2, 2007

Motion:

The Committee on Educational Policies and Planning (CEPP) moves that the faculty adopt a new Writing Program, outlined below in CEPP's Plan for Improving Student Writing, to replace the current writing requirement.

Rationale:

All of our graduates should be capable of producing written work that exhibits clarity of purpose, incisive reasoning, and grammatical correctness. Faculty and students agree that the present requirement of one writing-intensive (WI)¹ course (typically EN 105) is inadequate and that more attention to student writing is sorely needed. To create a culture at Skidmore that seriously values writing both as a primary means of communication and as a significant mode of learning, a comprehensive change in how the College conceives of writing -- from our admissions materials to our senior capstone projects -- is necessary. Given the primacy of writing in the educational mission of the college, the responsibility for developing and improving student writing is shared by all members of the faculty. Students as well must take responsibility for their written work and for improving their writing. Students should recognize that there is rarely a place for writing that is just "good enough."

Plan for Improving Student Writing:

The College curriculum should reflect these beliefs with 1) a foundation-level requirement in expository writing (either EN105 or a WI course), 2) a second writing requirement within each major determined by the department or program, and 3) opportunities for all students to practice and develop their writing skills in nearly all their classes, as well as in capstone experiences at the senior level. Although the Scribner Seminars are not writing-intensive courses and are not designed to be so, CEPP recognizes that the First-Year Experience plays an important role in introducing new students to the expectations of college writing.

1) The Expository Writing Requirement (EWR), which students typically fulfill with either EN105 or a 100-level WI course, is meant to immerse students in the process of writing informed by critical reading and careful reasoning. Special attention is given to developing ideas, writing from sources, organizing material, and revising drafts. Additional emphasis is on grammar, style, and formal conventions of writing. Students lacking adequate preparation or experience in expository writing will continue to be placed in EN 103: Writing Seminar I. EN 103 does not fulfill the EWR.

2) The pedagogical rationale for a second component to the writing requirement housed within each department or program is to provide students with opportunities to learn and practice the particular conventions of writing within their discipline. Although a one-course writing requirement in the major will introduce students to the conventions of writing in the discipline, a developmental approach with more than one required course will enable students to improve their writing incrementally. Departments will determine the exact nature of the departmental requirement, which might include one or a combination of the following: i) a sequence of Writing-Enhanced (WE)² courses approved by the department or program, ii) one or more Writing-Intensive courses, iii) 1-credit add-ons to existing courses, iv) a capstone experience, v) a portfolio, and vi) writing courses taught in a similar discipline. By no means do these suggestions exhaust the possibilities; CEPP encourages departments to develop creative alternatives.

3) Learning to write with clarity and correctness is a process that occurs when students have multiple opportunities and venues to practice writing and receive feedback. These opportunities should be available in nearly every course offered across the curriculum. Whether an art critique, a lab report, an analytical essay, a poem, a journal entry, or a traditional academic research paper, student writing improves with continual, rigorous practice, and constructive comments from instructors. Improvement in student writing is directly related to the frequency with which students write, the time and effort they put into their writing, and the quality of the feedback they receive from faculty and staff.

The goal of the new Writing Program is to ensure that students will 1) develop basic writing skills by fulfilling the foundational requirement in expository writing during their first three semesters; 2) learn the conventions of writing in their discipline by fulfilling their departmental writing requirement; 3) take additional courses across the disciplines that focus on writing in their sophomore, junior, and senior years; and 4) write a significant work in a capstone experience, where appropriate.

In addition to establishing a coordinated program of writing across the curriculum, the College should assess student writing on a regular basis, and provide ongoing faculty development activities in the teaching of writing and related issues.

The success of the new Writing Program depends on both institutional support in the form of resources and facilitation and, most importantly, the active participation of the faculty and academic departments. The bullet points below outline the steps the administration, academic departments and programs, and faculty will take in the next five years to implement the new Writing Program.

Institution/Administration

- appoint a college wide Director of Writing in Academic Affairs to facilitate the implementation of the new Writing Program (year 1)

- continue to ensure that all students can fulfill the Expository Writing Requirement within their first 3 semesters at Skidmore (year 1); 2 semesters (year 5)
- institute faculty workshops on writing and solicit workshop topics from the faculty; provide financial support for faculty participants (year 2)
- strengthen the Writing Center by hiring one or more professional(s) with proven writing skills and experience with students to work at the Writing Center alongside peer tutors (year 2)
- coordinate the various offices in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs offering writing support to students (year 2)
- emphasize in our admissions materials the centrality of writing in a Skidmore education (year 1)

Departments

- identify the particular writing goals for students majoring in your discipline and develop a writing requirement within the major that seeks to achieve these goals; submit proposals to the College Curriculum Committee (year 3-4)
- identify strong student writers for peer tutoring in the major; provide peer tutors with discipline-specific training either in the department or through the Writing Center (year 2)
- develop WE and, ideally, WI courses at the 100-, 200-, or 300-level and deliver regularly (year 3-4)¹

Faculty

- adopt a common writing guide (perhaps a revised *Skidmore Guide to Writing*) and encourage all students and faculty to use it
- distribute WI and EN 105 guidelines as well as sample syllabi to faculty members so that they know the sort of writing instruction taught in these courses and can expand on this instruction in their own courses
- develop 1-credit add-ons or 1-credit courses that focus on specific aspects of writing; topics might include grammar, citation and documentation styles, and disciplinary conventions of writing

- describe the role of writing in course syllabi and include writing in the course objectives (where appropriate) when submitting new courses to the College Curriculum Committee
- ask job candidates how they use writing in their courses
- explore how other areas of the Skidmore curriculum might serve as important, nontraditional ways to supplement the College's writing objectives, such as the study of a foreign language

Assessment

Assessment should occur in two areas: program assessment and direct assessment of student writing. Program assessment might include reviewing: 1) new course objectives approved by the College Curriculum Committee to gauge the ways faculty address writing in their courses; 2) evaluations of the writing workshops for faculty; and 3) departmental assessment of writing within the major.

Assessment of student writing might include evaluating: 1) first-year students' writing after many have taken EN 105 or a WI course; 2) a random sample of the writing by sophomores, juniors, and seniors to provide a profile of each class's writing; and 3) the writing in senior capstone experiences. These three components will help us to answer the question of what distinguishes student writing in each of the four years of college and help us develop appropriate expectations for student writing for each year in college.

¹ The **Writing Intensive** Guidelines are as follows: **1)** each week or at least bi-weekly, students should write drafts and revisions, over the course of the semester producing several finished works (essays, summaries, research papers, reports and so forth). The length of the papers may vary as appropriate to the discipline and the instructor's intentions, but the general expectation is that completed papers will total twenty-five or more pages of formal writing. Faculty might also choose to use journal-writing and other less structured writing exercises to augment the process of developing formal papers; **2)** a writing-intensive course must include, at a number of points during the semester, classroom activities which examine the writing process. These normally include generating ideas and principles of organization; gathering and documenting information; determining an appropriate audience and voice; structuring the paper as a whole; revising; peer critiquing; attending to questions of grammar, syntax, and word usage; **3)** writing-intensive courses should introduce students to the revision process and provide them with the opportunity to revise. The process of revision must be an integral part of the writing assignments and instruction. Whether revision is built into the assignment or done as an additional graded paper will be a matter for each instructor to decide.

² The **Writing Enhanced** Guidelines are as follows: **1)** students should have repeated writing experiences of one-, two, and/or three-five page writing assignments throughout the course with a suggested total of 10-20 pages; these assignments may be in addition to longer writing (particularly final) projects. This writing can take a variety of forms (e.g., lab reports, essays, research papers, response papers, journals, etc.); **2)** students should receive feedback from the faculty on these assignments – in writing and/or in small group or one-on-one tutorials; faculty may choose to employ peer critiques of student writing as well; **3)** students should have the opportunity to revise some of their writing. The faculty can choose to play an active role in the revision process, or, conversely, the faculty could require the students to take their written work to the Writing Center, revise and then submit to the faculty the first and final drafts of their work.