

Expository Writing Requirement [30 March 2005]

MOTION:

The Committee on Educational Policy and Planning moves that the faculty adopt the following change in the college Expository Writing Requirement: the current college expository writing requirement that is fulfilled by completing EN 105, EN 105Honors, or a Writing Intensive course before the end of the student's sophomore year will be replaced by **EN 105, EN 105Honors, or a one¹ Writing Intensive course** to be completed by the end of the sophomore year and two other writing courses (designated as either Writing Intensive or Writing Enriched) taken throughout the student's college career. Those students who need to take EN 103 Writing Seminar I as preparation for meeting this requirement must do so by the end of their first year.

RATIONALE:

For implementation in the fall of 2006 for the class of 2010.

We believe that students' progress in writing is developmental, and that students will benefit from repeated opportunities to practice writing skills in a variety of academic settings, using a variety of sources, and responding to a variety of audiences and purposes. Our proposed revision takes into account a student's cognitive development and underscores the significance of writing in the student's intellectual life.

Writing Intensive Classes. Students currently satisfy the Expository Writing Requirement before the end of their sophomore year by taking one writing course drawn from the various sections of EN 105/105H or any other course designated as Writing Intensive. These courses...

- have the valuable aspect of being smaller than 18 students, affording faculty members opportunities for close and intense work with students.
- concentrate on the development of a student's ability to write cogently and clearly through critical feedback on the structure of their essays and the efficacy of their language.

The most common way that students satisfy this requirement is through EN 105 (33 sections in the 2004-05 academic year) and EN 105H (seven sections); however, several other departments (including, but not limited to, Anthropology, Biology, Classics, History, Mathematics, and Music) have developed courses that address these concerns while delivering discipline-specific concepts. With the proposed change, the Department of English is prepared to continue to support the Expository Writing Requirement at the current level.

Writing Enriched Classes. CEPP recommends extending the kinds of feedback found in Writing Intensive courses to other contexts, recognizing the contributions of faculty who pay close attention to writing and to instilling in

¹ This modification in the revised proposal's language addresses the concerns of some faculty regarding the continued existence of EN 105 as one of the ways of satisfying the requirement.

students the value of clear and effective communication. These faculty members are generally unable to devote the same time and attention to individual students as they might if they were delivering a Writing Intensive course. Such faculty, in addition to helping their students to fathom and to control their subject matter, commonly comment on the structure, grammar and spelling of the essays, and the citation and referencing of sources. A department could designate (with Curriculum Committee approval) courses in which (a) faculty members give feedback on student writing regarding both content and style, (b) students have the opportunity to apply that feedback to their writing, and (c) these writing assignments total at least fifteen pages over the course of the semester.

The proposal would require students to take two writing courses beyond their initial EN 105/105H or designated Writing Intensive course. Students would take these two additional courses at any time during their four years at Skidmore. These courses could include Writing Intensive courses.

Last year, the Expository Writing Committee did a survey of departments to see how many courses had at least fifteen pages of writing. While we presume that not all of these 392 courses provide the kinds of feedback described above, we do expect that a significant number of educational experiences—from surveys to senior theses—would meet the proposal's expectations for Writing Enriched classes. In the fall of 2004 alone, Skidmore faculty members offered over 70 courses at the 200 and 300 level with enrollments of 25 or less in just the humanities and social sciences, not counting senior theses and independent studies. Presuming that expository writing has an important role in many of these courses, CEPP believes that faculty would find a number of opportunities to reinforce the importance of writing in their disciplines and that students would have ample choices.

Given (a) that each class consists of approximately 575 students, (b) that students would take two Writing Enriched courses, and (c) that the average section size would be approximately 20-25, the proposal would need about 45-60 Writing Enriched courses each year. Current caps on class size range include 27-33 for 200-level courses and 18-22 for 300-level courses; however, the guidelines for caps also indicate that smaller caps can apply to courses for a variety of reasons.

CEPP recognizes that this is just a first step in a strategy that would strengthen the writing abilities of our students. To that end, CEPP will charge a taskforce to develop guidelines for Writing Enriched courses, oversee the evolution of a college-wide conversation about writing, and sponsor workshops to help faculty enhance the writing of their students.