



#92-17
App 11/17/92
Senate App 12/1/92

Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705

November 9, 1992

TOPIC: Annual Report on Writing-Intensive Approval Process
TO: University-Wide Undergraduate Curriculum Committee
FROM: Liberal Studies Committee

The September 26, 1989, agreement between the UWUCC and the LSC concerning approval of writing-intensive courses calls for the LSC to report annually on how these procedures are working.

At its July 13, 1992, meeting, the LSC reviewed the procedures and agreed that it is basically satisfied with the way they are working.

There is, however, one important exception to this satisfaction. For nearly two years now, the LSC has been concerned that the Criteria for writing-intensive courses are unclear and sufficiently lacking in specificity that applying them fairly is problematic. We also find the same minor insufficiencies repeated in numerous proposals. Since these proposals are otherwise exemplary, we conclude that the problem lies in unclear criteria.

Therefore, we are submitting with this year's report a revised version of the criteria. We ask that you approve the revision and submit it to the Senate for action.

For the record, as of November 15, 1992, approvals by category have broken down this way:

Type I (Professor Commitment): 65 approvals [1991: 32]

Type II (Departmental Course): 41 approvals [1991: 20]

Type III (Individual Professor/Course): 19 approvals [1991: 8]

In sum, except for clarifying the criteria, we see no reason to change what the LSC and UWUCC have been doing so far.

Rationale for Revised Writing-intensive Criteria:

The current criteria for writing-intensive courses were approved by the University Senate in February 1989. Although they have served well, the Liberal Studies Committee has become increasingly convinced that certain modifications are advisable.

The LSC does not believe that the proposed revisions change the intent of the original criteria. Therefore, it sees no reason to reexamine previously approved proposals; the revised criteria will be used only for future proposals.

Essentially, the proposed revisions intend little more than clarity and honesty. The original writing criteria are unlike any of the other sets of Liberal Studies criteria. The others explicitly list items that "must" and "should" be included in proposals. The original writing criteria do not. Instead, they mention things that are "characteristic of" and things that are "contrary to the spirit of" writing-intensive courses. But they are not very helpful in explaining which "characteristics" are essential and which are merely beneficial options.

Over the years, a type of "past practice"--as determined by what successful proposals have almost invariably included--has grown up. But it is awkward and inefficient at best, and dishonest at worst, to evaluate proposals by criteria that have not been clearly articulated to proposers. Yet, without revision, the LSC had little choice except to use what it has.

The revised criteria, by stating forthrightly what was implicit in the original criteria, will mean fewer proposals need to be returned for minor changes that stem from nothing more than overlooking a nuance in the criteria. The result should be less frustration and less work all around.

For the convenience of the UWUCC, bracketed notations key the revised criteria to the applicable parts of the old ones. Three excessively negative, and largely irrelevant criteria, have been eliminated. The introductory definitions, goal statements, and implementation guidelines that precede and follow the Criteria will remain in place unchanged.

[REVISION APPROVED BY LIBERAL STUDIES COMMITTEE, NOVEMBER 5, 1992]

CRITERIA FOR WRITING-INTENSIVE COURSES

In designing writing-intensive courses, departments are urged to be creative and to modify/design courses which are both faithful to the university-wide criteria and reflective of the differences among fields of study. Faculty are urged to determine the number of papers or words (specific number and kinds of writing assignments), grading scales, and teaching strategies appropriate for individual writing-intensive courses.

All writing-intensive courses must:

- (1) Integrate carefully planned writing assignments into the course so that they increase student learning and enhance student ability to write. [reworded parts of #1 and #3]
- (2) List the improvement of student writing among the course objectives in the syllabus. [reshaped #9]
- (3) Distribute specific written instructions, including criteria for evaluation, for major assignments. [#2 with addition of remark about criteria for evaluation]
- (4) Guide students in conceiving, organizing, and presenting written material in ways appropriate to the subject being studied. [reworded #7]
- (5) Provide ample opportunities for students to improve their writing skills and to have at least 5000 words (approximately 15-20 typed pages) comprising two or more separate assignments evaluated by an instructor. Depending on the nature of the course, appropriate writing assignments may include such formats as case studies, laboratory reports, journals, letters, memos, formal essays, research articles, project or grant proposals, and so forth. [#4 revised]
- (6) Provide an opportunity for students to revise at least one of their writing assignments after receiving response from the professor. [reworded portion of #3]
- (7) Include, with whatever informal or draft writing is appropriate, at least one assignment that requires students to produce finished, edited prose. [new]
- (8) Consider written assignments as a major part of the final grade; in most cases this should be 50% or more. [revised #10]

In addition, all writing-intensive courses should:

- (1) Give attention to both the process and the product of writing. Intervention in the writing process, particularly in its early stages, is a highly effective way of helping students produce better written work. For example, students can be assisted with task definition, topic selection, information gathering, organization and formatting, and revision strategies. Major assignments should have clearly defined stages of preparation and regular progress reviews. [part of #1 and #3 with elaboration]
- (2) Provide opportunities for students to consult with instructors and perhaps tutors or one another as they prepare drafts of assignments or revisions. [#5, #6]
- (3) Provide an appropriate variety of writing experiences by including writing with different audiences, purposes, or formats. There should also be an appropriate mixture of in-class and out-of-class writing and of graded and ungraded writing. [part of #3 and #8 and negative #4, #5 and #6]

[Eliminated: negative #1, #2, #3]

ORIGINAL VERSION

CRITERIA FOR WRITING-INTENSIVE COURSES

In designing writing-intensive courses, departments are urged to be creative and to modify/design courses which are both faithful to the university-wide criteria and reflective of the differences among fields of study. Faculty are urged to determine the number of papers or words (specific number and kinds of writing assignments), grading scales, and teaching strategies appropriate for individual writing-intensive courses.

The following practices are characteristics of writing intensive courses to be encouraged:

- (1) Reinforcing good writing habits by means of carefully planned writing assignments with clearly defined stages of preparation and regular progress reviews.
- (2) Distributing specific written instructions for major assignments.
- (3) Emphasizing both the process and the product of writing. Writing, both in and out of class, should be used as a tool for learning; this should involve peer input and revision.
- (4) Providing ample opportunities for students to improve their writing skills and to have at least 5000 words (approximately 20 typed pages) comprising two or more separate assignments evaluated by an instructor; depending on the nature of the course, appropriate writing assignments may include such formats as case studies, laboratory reports, journals, letters, memos, formal essays, research articles, project or grant proposals, and so forth.
- (5) Providing opportunities for students to consult with instructors and perhaps tutors or one another as they prepare drafts of assignments or revisions.
- (6) Encouraging student-teacher conferences.
- (7) Instructing students how to conceive, organize, and present material in ways appropriate to the subject being studied.
- (8) Including ungraded writing.
- (9) Providing rationales based on course objectives for all writing assignments.
- (10) Considering the quality of written assignments as a major part of the final grade. In most cases this should be 50% or more.

The following practices are deemed contrary to the spirit of writing-intensive courses.

- (1) Offering a proficiency exam (such as CLEP) or a thesis in lieu of a writing-intensive course.**
- (2) Offering only short answer or multiple choice exams.**
- (3) Requiring a single writing assignment (such as a term paper), particularly where the writing process has not been carefully monitored throughout the semester.**
- (4) Requiring only in-class or only out-of-class writing.**
- (5) Requiring that instructors grade/respond to all writing assignments.**
- (6) Requiring writing of only one specific type.**