Sample Response to COLL 150 Proposal Form

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Semester and year this course will be offered:
   Spring 2015, Fall 2015, and every semester after that...

When you offer this course, will you have completed at least one semester of teaching at W&M?
   Yes

Current position: Non-tenure Eligible

Course prefix (e.g., AFST 150)
   BIOL 150

Course Title (e.g., African Theatre)
   Emerging Diseases

Department/Program Chair's email:
   elbrad@wm.edu

Have you previously taught this course as a COLL 150?
   No

Please answer the following five questions to show how this course will fulfill the requirement for 6000 words/24 pages of writing through multiple writing assignments.

1. Formal Writing Assignments: The Writing Committee defines "formal" writing as that which requires students' mastery of formal concerns--paragraph development, mechanics, style, etc.--as well as mastery of a content or method. Response papers and rough drafts, for example, might count as either formal or informal writing depending on whether individual instructors consider formal concerns in their evaluations. Please indicate numbers, length, frequency of papers, and how writing will be evaluated. Also indicate whether students will submit drafts and/or revisions and for which papers. The Writing Committee recommends that at least half the writing be formal, analytic writing.

   Students have two formal writing assignments for the course: an approximately five-page book review and a 12-15 page library research paper. They turn in two drafts of each, a first version and a final version. For each of these formal writing assignments, the grading criteria are the same for the initial and final drafts, even though the initial drafts are worth fewer points than the final drafts are. Thus, I do not consider the first versions to be informal writing assignments, and neither do my students!
2. Informal Writing Assignments: Rough drafts, response papers, blogs or Discussion Board posts, research logs, etc., may be considered informal assignments. Please indicate numbers, length, frequency of papers, and how writing will be evaluated.

1) Over the course of the semester, students turn in approximately fifteen one-paragraph summaries of the scientific research articles that their fellow students present in class: reading each article and writing a summary is a part of the journal club assignment. These automatically receive full credit.

2) Students also turn in a set of discussion points based on each day's reading assignment; I limit these to a typed, single-spaced page, one side only, and surprisingly, many students fill their pages every time. In the spring of 2014, there were 33 days on which students turned in discussion points, so this means that each student turned in on the order of 30 single-spaced pages of informal writing in the form of discussion points alone. Discussion points are graded on content, rather than writing quality, and I use a check/zero system: if they are interesting and pertinent to the reading, they receive a check, and thus full points. If the discussion points look as though they could have been composed without a student's actually having read the assignment, they receive a zero. Over the years, very few students have turned in discussion points that were bad enough to receive a zero.

3. How will you fulfill the requirement to introduce students to research methods appropriate to the subject and to orient the student to the resources at Swem Library? Swem Faculty/Departmental liaisons may be found at: https://swem.wm.edu/liaisons

As a part of preparing to write their research papers, students participate in an in-class library session at Swem with two of the research librarians to learn how to use relevant library resources, including the library catalog, RefWorks and the bioscience databases; they also meet individually with a research librarian to work on finding appropriate resources for their term papers. Completing the required meeting with the librarian counts as part of the research paper grade.

4. How will you provide writing instruction and integrate discussion about writing into class? Describe how you will include at least one opportunity for feedback and revision in the writing process. Include specific strategies you might use to help non-traditional students, speakers of other dialects and languages, and students who lack strong grammar training.

Revision is integral to the two formal writing assignments for the course, the book review and the research paper. Students turn in a first version and a final version for each assignment and receive detailed comments from me on both versions; they also receive comments from their writing partners on the initial versions and provide comments on their writing partners' initial versions. My comments on the initial versions include a checklist that I use to flag common writing problems, such as wordiness and poor paragraph organization, and that directs students to appropriate sections of our writing manual for information on how to improve those aspects of their writing.

Students are always welcome to meet individually with me to discuss their writing, and many do, particularly as they make revisions to their papers.

In class, we talk about writing issues explicitly four times.

1) On the day on which I return the graded first version of the book review, I bring the students' attention to the fact that the writing process begins as an author-centered effort, but needs to
become audience-centered by the time the final draft is underway. That day, I also talk about ways in which to most effectively organize a paper that presents an argument, as book reviews do.

2) Before the term paper outline is due, I go over an annotated References section from the journal whose style we use, Emerging Infectious Diseases, to help students understand how the bibliographic information for items in their References section needs to be entered.

3) Several days before the term paper outline is due, I talk with the group about how best to organize their material, focusing on the two most common types of papers for my course, pathogen-centered papers and papers that focus on social issues. I also show the students how a primitive form of concept mapping can make the process of organizing their papers easier.

4) As the students begin to write the first version of the term papers, I have a careful conversation with them about plagiarism and how scientists acknowledge their sources.

In addition to the in-class discussions, I also ask students to read relevant chapters of *Writing Papers in the Biological Sciences*, our writing manual.

Informal discussion about writing is also part of our discussion of the readings for the course: we frequently comment on the audience for which the piece seems to have been written as well as on the effectiveness of the author's writing.

5. What grammar and style handbook will you require students to buy/use? The Writing Committee recommends one that covers the process of writing, grammar rules, and documentation forms (MLA, APA, CMS) as well as information for English language learners. Please contact Sharon Zuber if you have questions about which book to require (slzube@wm.edu). You can review samples in the Writing Resources Center.

For many years, I have used Victoria McMillan’s "Writing Papers in the Biological Sciences" as the writing manual for Emerging Diseases. This book does a nice job of covering the writing process in general, and is also very useful for students who are learning to read and write scientific papers. Given that the term paper assignment requires students to use ICMJE format (http://www.icmje.org/), my students need a manual that includes information about properly documenting sources for scientific papers. I have referred students with special needs, such as English language learners, to the Writing Center, as the experts there can often recommend writing manuals that meet their specific needs best.