

TO: Faculty of Arts and Sciences
FROM: The Educational Policy Committee
SUBJECT: Proposed Changes in the Writing Requirement
DATE: February 25, 1991

The Educational Policy Committee with the support of the Department of English and the Writing Committee proposes the following changes in the lower-division writing requirement:

1. To eliminate cross-grading from Writing 101,
2. To add the grade F to the grades possible in Writing 101, and
3. To allow specially designated writing intensive courses to satisfy the lower-division writing requirement.

The proposed changes and the rationale for each are presented below.

EPC Motion Concerning
WRITING 101

The Educational Policy Committee proposes the following changes for the 1992-93 Undergraduate Program Catalogue [additions to current wording are underlined and deletions italicized]:

COLLEGE COURSES
101. WRITING
(See p. 94)

Practice in writing under supervision, with frequent conferences. May be used to satisfy the lower-division writing requirement by students who are not exempted by test scores or special examination. [~~Delete: Students should satisfactorily complete the course during their first year at the College, and must complete the course by the end of their fourth semester.~~] Each section is limited to fifteen students.

NOTE: Writing 101 is graded A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, R, or F. (R-- i.e., Repeat--will not appear on the student's permanent record. The grade of F may be awarded only to those students who do not complete their course work.) [~~Delete: To receive credit, (a) students must receive a grade of C- or better from their instructor, and, (b) one of the students' essays must receive a grade of C- or better from another member of the writing faculty.~~] To receive credit, students must receive a grade of C- or better. [~~Delete: The course will not appear on the student's permanent record until credit is received.~~] The course will appear on the student's permanent record when a grade other than R is received.

RATIONALE

The elimination of cross-grading:

The English department on December 12 agreed unanimously to recommend to the EPC and the faculty of Arts & Sciences the elimination of cross-grading

and the exit requirement from Writing 101; "in their place we [will] substitute four required staff meetings for all 101 instructors in any given semester."

Three reasons are given, based on answers to questionnaires distributed last year.

1). Cross-grading is meant to ensure consistency; in fact, students believe that their instructor and their cross-grader hold different standards for evaluation. In addition, instructors complain of general inconsistencies course-wide, including how much time the students have to work on the cross-graded assignment and what type of assignment they are given. Finally, some instructors feel that the system fails to pick out the weak students, and that when it works, it works through negotiation.

2). Some instructors believe that cross-grading undermines their own teaching; it is frequently viewed as a vote of no confidence among the WR 101 faculty. Faculty generally believe that they should be trusted to follow course guidelines and to determine which students pass and which fail. To our knowledge, in no other course offered at the College does someone other than the instructor decide which students pass.

3). Freshman seminars are increasingly being used to satisfy the lower-division writing requirement. Normally these seminars should follow the same guidelines as in WR 101. But, since less than half the faculty presently using cross-grading find it even moderately effective, the writing committee feels it cannot justify asking faculty members teaching freshman seminars to submit to the process.

Adding the "F":

Because it is currently impossible to fail WR 101, some students use the "R" ("Repeat") to take an unofficial underload (they stop attending and devote their time to other courses). Therefore, we recommend the use of the "F" grade for those students who do not complete their course work.

EPC Motion Concerning FRESHMAN SEMINARS & LOWER-DIVISION WRITING REQUIREMENT

The Educational Policy Committee proposes the following changes for 1992-93 Undergraduate Program Catalogue [additions to current wording are underlined and deletions italicized]:

FRESHMAN SEMINARS (To be added to the Special Programs section p. 52)

The freshman seminar program is designed to offer students a small-class experience in their first year at the College. Freshman seminars are usually numbered 150 and are offered by most departments. Freshmen have priority in enrollment in these courses. Freshman seminars designated "R" and other courses designated "R" may be used to satisfy the lower-division writing requirement when the student earns a C- or better.

LOWER-DIVISION WRITING REQUIREMENT
(See p. 43)

Students whose combined SAT Verbal and English Achievement scores fall below 1300 must satisfactorily complete, by the end of their fourth semester and normally during their first year at the College, a one-semester course in writing--either Writing 101 or a course designated "R"--unless they (1) present at entrance Advanced Placement Test scores of 4 or 5, or (2) apply to take and demonstrate satisfactory performance on a writing test administered during their first year at the College. A student whose combined scores are 1300 or better may take a course in writing but is not required to do so.

RATIONALE

Research has found that writing becomes more effective in subject-oriented courses than in the common freshman composition course. For the past year the writing committee has been running a pilot project, approved by the EPC, to explore the use of writing-intensive "freshman seminars" to satisfy the lower-division writing requirement. Based on the experience of the pilot project, the Writing Committee and the Educational Policy Committee propose that the following guidelines be used to determine which freshman seminars or other lower-division courses may satisfy the lower-division writing requirement.

Guidelines:

1). All interested faculty must submit to the writing committee a course description, including a reading list and a description of writing assignments with approximate due dates, two weeks before the course schedule is due.

2). To satisfy the lower-division writing requirement, a course must:

a) require at least 6000 words of writing. At least half (10-12 pages) must be formal, analytic writing; the rest might include a variety of assignments -- rough drafts of formal papers, response papers, microthemes (very short but formal responses to instructors' prompts), in-class essays, research logs, etc. -- provided these are commented on by the instructor.

b) allow for repeated opportunities to write. For example, the formal assignment might be one research paper, but the student would submit drafts throughout the semester.

c) require basic library research, or introduction to primary research appropriate to the discipline.

d) demonstrate sufficient time for discussion of writing (such discussions may take place in individual conferences).