

Frequently-Asked Questions

1. What is the Writing-Enriched Curriculum program?

The University of Minnesota's innovative Writing-Enriched Curriculum Program (WEC) provides academic departments with a way to ensure that discipline-relevant writing and writing instruction are intentionally infused into their undergraduate curricula. The centerpiece of the WEC method is the Undergraduate Writing Plan, which is iteratively generated, implemented, and assessed by unit faculty working in collaboration with writing specialists from the WEC team. The program works toward the University's ultimate goal of graduating agile and effective writers in all disciplines by ensuring that all degree programs are "writing-enriched."

2. Why is the University of Minnesota investing in this writing initiative?

Data gathered by the Center for Writing's Faculty Writing Consultant program (2002–2006) and faculty focus groups conducted by the Provost's Strategic Positioning Writing Task Force (2005) were analyzed in 2006. These data indicated that although the University's 1999 Writing Intensive (WI) course initiative successfully decentralized writing instruction, WI courses were not always optimally located in curricula, writing instruction was not adequately transferring between WI and non-WI courses, and discipline-relevant assessment of writing was occurring too infrequently. In addition, our faculty realizes that requiring writing-intensive classes alone does not ensure better writing and that educational change cannot take place without the deep involvement of those who are doing the teaching. These perspectives were captured by the Provost's Writing Task Force when they proposed in their 2006 report that "a commitment to improving student writing must be a distinguishing feature of a baccalaureate degree from the University of Minnesota, across all majors and all disciplines of study...We recommend a systematic and comprehensive change in undergraduate writing so that instruction is woven throughout a student's undergraduate curriculum, not inserted in pieces." Thus, after completing a five-year, grant-funded pilot (2007–2012), during which 23 academic units engaged in the WEC process, the program continues implementation with fiscal support from the Office of Undergraduate Education.

3. How is Writing-Enriched different from Writing-Intensive?

The WEC Program is focused on entire curricula which are composed of individual courses, including Writing-Intensive courses. WEC's goal is to ensure that relevant writing and writing instruction are intentionally integrated and developmentally sequenced throughout the undergraduate programs and across a student's intellectual development from the freshman year through graduation, thus creating a culture of continuous growth and improvement for student writers.

WEC continues, expands, and deepens the direction initiated by the Writing Intensive (WI) requirement. While the WI requirement has successfully met its goal of ensuring that University of Minnesota students write in more courses across the disciplines, current WI courses are not consistently sequenced into degree programs and in some instances may not reflect departmental consensus or programmatic logic.

4. What's going to happen to Writing-Intensive courses?

WI courses will continue to be required* for Twin Cities students. As appropriate, these courses will be integrated into units' Writing Plans. In 2010, the Campus Writing Board revised the course guidelines for WI courses. [Revised WI guidelines](#) acknowledge changes in 21st Century Literacy practices and the ethos of the WEC Program.

*In addition to [the first-year writing requirement](#) students complete four WI courses. Two of the WI courses must be taken at the upper division level, one of which must be taken in their majors.

5. What are Writing Plans?

Writing Plans are documents in which a unit's faculty characterizes writing in their discipline, names the abilities with which they would like students to become proficient, maps these abilities into undergraduate course curricula, and plans for relevant writing assessment and instructional support. The WEC process is designed to ensure that each Writing Plan is faculty-driven, reflects relevant definitions of writing and course structures, and further, that unit faculty have regular opportunities to assess and revise their plan.



Frequently-Asked Questions

All Writing Plans are designed to address a set sequence of basic questions: How can writing in this discipline be characterized? What writing abilities should students in the unit's major(s) be able to demonstrate upon graduation? How can writing instruction be most effectively sequenced into the unit's undergraduate curricula so that graduating students are able to demonstrate desired writing abilities? What assessment strategies would the faculty like to see in place? What sorts of support do faculty need in order to achieve the optimal integration of relevant writing instruction?

As might be imagined, answers to these standard questions, and the discourse styles used to answer them, vary from unit to unit. Plans approved by the Campus Writing Board are posted on the [board's website](#).

6. What is the Campus Writing Board?

Underscoring its commitment to Writing-Enriched degree programs, the Provost's Office constituted the [Campus Writing Board](#) in 2008. With responsibilities that parallel those of the Council on Liberal Education, the Board has been appointed and formally charged by the Vice Provost and Dean for Undergraduate Education to oversee review and approval of WEC Writing Plans and WI courses. The board's inaugural meeting was held on March 31, 2008.

7. What is a WEC unit?

Faculty groups may decide to enter the WEC process in a variety of ways. There have been full colleges, departments with multiple majors, and even single majors that span departments who have engaged with the WEC Program to develop an undergraduate curriculum Writing Plan. The group that is involved in developing one Writing Plan has become known as a WEC Unit as they cannot all be classified in one way.

8. What resources directly support the WEC initiative?

The University's Office of the Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education:

This office serves as the fiscal and administrative home for the WEC Program. In a memo sent to Undergraduate Deans and Department heads in 2008, Provost Sullivan and Vice Provost McMaster characterized their ongoing support this way: "We understand that implementation of department Writing Plans will require additional financial resources and we have included new funds in budget planning.... In short, financial support for writing instruction will be enhanced rather than diminished in coming years."

The Center for Writing:

Writing Plan creation, implementation, and assessment efforts are directly supported by personnel from the WEC Team which reports to the Office of Undergraduate Education but is situated in the University's Center for Writing.

9. How will we know that the WEC initiative is working?

Multiple modes of assessment are embedded in the WEC process:

- Faculty-generated Writing Plans are assessed by the Campus Writing Board.
- Writing collected from upper-division students in each WEC unit is rated against faculty-generated criteria by panels of raters drawn from inside and outside the unit. These rating sessions take place every three years.
- Each Writing Plan describes steps that will be taken within the unit to self-assess implementation efforts.
- Student assessment of the WEC initiative is partially measured by questions included in the International Student Experience in Research Universities survey (SERU).
- Faculty Liaisons are surveyed each year to determine the efficacy of the WEC process.

10. What do faculty members who have participated in this program say about it?

"The WEC process has enabled me to examine what I do in most productive ways, as well as introducing me to new and exciting pedagogical possibilities in writing instruction. Many of my colleagues have expressed the same enthusiasm....I am convinced that [my department] will now provide even more coherent, consistent, comprehensive and effective writing instruction because of our participation in the WEC Project and the development of a departmental Writing Plan."



Frequently-Asked Questions

“In our program, the faculty have a sense of being overloaded and any new initiatives have to be considered very carefully in terms of available resources... [As a result of piloting the WEC Project,] there is an increased awareness of the WEC requirements [designated in the unit's Writing Plan] as faculty teach the courses that have been targeted. My own courses have included some of the concepts that are being included, in a more formal manner, and my evaluation of writing assignments has improved.”

“We in the [. . .] Department have prided ourselves on teaching writing well for years. But I am convinced that the [. . .] Department will now provide even more coherent, consistent, comprehensive, and effective writing instruction because of our participation in the WEC Project and the development of a departmental writing plan. Because we cannot separate how we teach writing from how we teach our subject, the WEC project has also facilitated a broader and extremely useful review and revision of our program for majors. My colleagues and I very much hope that the University will expand and promote the WEC program – with all the necessary resources, including staffing and funding – and continue to support it into the future.”

“The WEC team (1) gave ample time to revise surveys that reflected language and issues in our department; (2) adapted processes to respect our culture, e.g., inviting part-time faculty, graduate students and staff to participate; (3) was excellent in providing timely minutes of meetings; and (4) was able to work with faculty members who were not always understanding of the process and expectations.”

11. Why do units enroll in the WEC Program?

1. **They recognize the importance of graduating agile communicators** and may be dissatisfied with current approaches to writing instruction and/or writing abilities demonstrated by majors enrolled in their programs.
2. **They could use fiscal and service support** in achieving more optimal integration of relevant writing instruction into their curricula. Forms of support currently offered to units enrolled in the WEC Program include the following:
 - a. Fiscal support: Faculty Liaison funding (\$11,000 per Liaison); funds for implementing Writing Plans (capped at \$75,000 for departments, more for larger units).
 - b. Service support: customized workshops and consultations targeted for unit faculty members and TAs.
3. **They want formative assessment data** but don't have time or funds to collect information themselves. Assessment data supplied to all WEC units includes the following:
 - a. Comprehensive survey data regarding characteristics of relevant writing and assessment of student writing abilities and the instruction they receive. This data is gathered from students in the major, faculty and instructional staff, and professional affiliates.
 - b. Samples of student writing, collected from across their curricula, de-identified, and cataloged for use in teaching.
 - c. Longitudinal assessment of student writing, conducted every 2-3 years, in which capstone-level writing is assessed against criteria generated locally, by the unit's faculty.
 - d. Basic curricular mapping that provides faculty members and instructors from across the unit's curriculum with descriptive information about the kinds of writing and writing instruction that are taking place in all courses, thus allowing for collaborative sequencing.
4. **They support the model of change forwarded by the WEC Program**, namely: independent, faculty-driven, elective, and funded.

12. How are units selected to participate in the WEC process?

Each year, 2-5 new units (departments, schools, or colleges) are engaged. Selection is based on multiple factors including unit size, department/college affiliation, and faculty/administrative interest. Units currently engaged in the WEC process can be seen at <http://wec.umn.edu>. Eventually, all academic units (departments, schools, colleges) offering undergraduate curricula will become involved in the process of creating, implementing, and assessing Undergraduate Writing Plans. Units interested in being considered for our next cohort should:

1. **Review information** included on the WEC website (<http://wec.umn.edu>) and contact the WEC program with questions (or, where relevant, request that we attend a faculty meeting in order to address questions and concerns).
2. **Complete the program's [Letter of Interest form](#)**



Frequently-Asked Questions

13. What kind of time commitment is expected from department faculty members who are not serving as Faculty Liaisons?

Not much. During the first year, when the Writing Plan is created, they respond to an online survey (15 minutes), attend their usual faculty meetings (four of which are dedicated to WEC), and review drafts of their Writing Plan. Instructors of three courses supply the WEC team with writing samples. In ensuing years, voluntary participation in faculty-designed activity is the only expectation.

14. Is anyone available to talk to faculty about WEC prior to the application deadline?

Yes. A member of the WEC team would be happy to attend a portion of a faculty meeting to provide information about the model and to address questions. This can be arranged on fairly short notice by the program's administrative coordinator, Molly Bendzick (mollyb@umn.edu). Consider also contacting current [Faculty Liaisons](#). They've been through the process and have expressed an interest in talking with interested others.

