

# WEC

WRITING-ENRICHED  
CURRICULUM

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

# Frequently Asked Questions

## 1. What is the Writing-Enriched Curriculum (WEC) project?

The WEC project pilots a process for enabling faculty members in all disciplines to infuse meaningful writing and writing instruction into their undergraduate curricula at the University of Minnesota. After a four-year pilot period (2007–2011) in which the project will engage 22 academic units, a course for expanded implementation will be determined.

## 2. Why is the University of Minnesota investing in this new 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) and its Writing Across the Curriculum Working Group (2005) indicate that

1. University administrators, faculty members, and undergraduates agree that writing is essential to academic study and research, professional performance, and self-realization. They agree also that instructors in the disciplines are best qualified to teach the writing of their fields.
2. Students are confused about the University's current WI requirements. They find, for example, that courses not designated as writing-intensive actually require more writing than courses that carry a "W" and that WI courses are in many cases sequenced irregularly and sometimes counter-intuitively into programs' curricula.
3. Faculty members express confusion about what constitutes "writing" and "writing instruction" within the context of the courses they teach and also about which writing abilities they can reasonably expect of first-year and fourth-year students.

So, despite our success in getting students to take more courses that involve writing, confusion expressed by instructors and students suggests that we have not achieved a deep integration of writing at

the departmental or individual level. Our faculty realizes that requiring writing-intensive classes 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."

In 2007, the Bush Foundation awarded the university almost \$1 million to support the development and piloting of a Writing-Enriched Curriculum project.

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

The WEC project 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. Therefore, where the WI requirement focuses on individual courses, WEC focuses on undergraduate curricula and faculty ownership. As a result, writing will be ubiquitous, integrated across a student's intellectual development from the freshman year through graduation, and thus creating a culture of continuous growth and improvement for student writers.

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

WI courses will continue to be offered and to be required for Twin Cities students. As appropriate, these courses will be integrated into Writing Plans.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 5. How are units selected to participate in the WEC pilot?

Selection of pilot units is based on multiple factors that include the nature of the discipline and its discourse, the size of its undergraduate programs, its college affiliation, and its history with the WI initiative. Each semester, therefore, the WEC Team tries to include a science, a social science or humanities, a unit with a professional affiliation, and a field that incorporates significant non-verbal communication.

As of Fall 2009, eleven units are engaged in the pilot: Mechanical Engineering (IT); Political Science (CLA); Horticultural Science (CFANS); Design, Housing, and Apparel (CDes); History (CLA); Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior (CBS); the School of Nursing (AHC); Geography (CLA); Spanish and Portuguese Studies (CLA); Theatre and Dance (CLA); the College of Biological Sciences (CBS); African American and African Studies (CLA); and the School of Kinesiology (CEHD).

Units who would be interested in participating in the pilot should contact [Angela Sprunger](#), the project's Administrative Coordinator.

### 6. 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 courses, and plans for relevant writing assessment and instructional support.

The WEC process is designed to ensure that each Writing Plan reflects individual units' disciplinary definitions of writing, instructor's writing expectations, departmental course structures, and instructional dimensions, and further, that those units' faculty have regular opportunities to assess and revise their plan.

All Writing Plans are designed to address a set sequence of questions. Plans that have been approved by the [Campus Writing Board](#) are posted on the board's site.

### 7. What is the Campus Writing Board?

Underscoring its commitment to Writing-Enriched degree programs, the Provost's Office has created an entirely new legislative body, the [Campus Writing Board](#), with responsibilities that parallel the role of the Council on Liberal Education. Board members have been appointed and formally charged by the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education to oversee approval of WEC Writing Plans and Writing-Intensive courses. The board's inaugural meeting was held on March 31, 2008. For more information about the Campus Writing Board, contact [Leslie Zenk](#).

### 8. What kinds of resources support the WEC initiative?

Support for the WEC process comes from three sources:

1. Funds from the [Bush Foundation](#) support the four-year pilot process (2007–2011). More specifically, these funds (almost \$1 million) are used to buy release time for Faculty Liaisons within participating units, allowing these individuals to take time to engage their faculty colleagues in the process and to draft rich Writing Plans.
2. Fiscal requests included in Writing Plans are submitted to the University's Office of Vice Provost and Dean of Undergraduate Education. In a memo sent to Undergraduate Deans and Department heads in 2008, Senior 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."
3. The Writing Plan implementation and assessment efforts are directly supported by personnel from the WEC Team and the five programs that comprise the University's [Center for Writing](#). Depending on units' Writing Plans, other services that may be brought into the implementation process include the Center for

## Frequently Asked Questions

Teaching and Learning, University Librarians, and the Digital Media Center.

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

Assessment of Writing Plans is largely in the hands of faculty within participating units. After their Writing Plan has been in implementation phase for one or more years, the faculty collaborates with the WEC Team's Assessment Coordinator to assess its efficacy and revise as necessary. Revised plans are submitted to the Campus Writing Board and Office of Vice Provost for approval before they move back into implementation phase.

The Assessment Coordinator is also conducting ongoing assessment of the pilot process as a whole in order to ensure an efficacious and practical system for supporting its campus-wide implementation. At the end of the Bush supported pilot period (June 2011) a final report will be issued.

### 10. What do faculty members who have participated in this project 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."

"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. How does the WEC initiative relate to other new initiatives affecting undergraduate curricula?

In the context of recent Strategic Positioning efforts, the University has adopted undergraduate Student Learning Outcomes and Student Development Outcomes, revised the Twin Cities Liberal Education Requirements, and implemented a new Twin Cities undergraduate writing initiative, with a focus on development of a Writing-Enriched Curriculum.

To varying extents, each of these efforts engages faculty members in a process of questioning and discussing characteristics and benchmarks of discipline-specific knowledge and discourse and then translating these characteristics into abilities that students can develop as they take courses in their majors. Taken together, these

## Frequently Asked Questions

---

initiatives represent an important partnership that supports student learning, brings greater coherence and accountability to our undergraduate education, and recognizes important differences among academic disciplines.