Activity #1: The Faculty Writing Academy (WA)

Overview

The faculty WA is intended to function as a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) focused on the design and implementation of writing ladder courses in diverse disciplines. Each year, a WA will serve as an important tool for the implementation of the faculty development portion of the QEP. The FLC model was chosen because research confirms its effectiveness both in developing faculty skills and in enhancing student learning (Cox, 2004; Furco & Moely, 2012; Addis et al, 2013; Lancaster et al, 2014).

Cox (2004) noted that participation in an FLC provides "deep, double-loop learning" that offers "many opportunities to reflect with other FLC participants on its effectiveness and the assessment of resulting student learning and feedback" (p.18). The cross-disciplinary character of our proposed WA cohorts will promote collaboration among faculty from a variety of disciplines as well as faculty in different stages of their careers. Because all participants will focus on developing discipline-specific course outlines that will incorporate writing tasks to build competence and fluency in student writing, the FLC will also promote continued integration of the QEP goals throughout the university curriculum. The effort should also help build the mutual faculty support necessary for any pedagogical innovation; this support is identified as a significant factor for improving teaching and enhancing student learning (Furco & Moely, 2012). Finally, participants in the WA will be supported in their efforts to produce a piece of scholarship related to their pedagogical work. Not only is the inclusion of scholarship a typical feature of a FLC, it will also help participants balance their substantial teaching obligations with the need to build a scholarly record.

For the first four years of the QEP, three faculty members each from specific undergraduate disciplines will participate in the WA. The plan is that over a four–year period, fifteen undergraduate majors and five large Core courses will have had faculty participants in WA. The targeted majors represent about 15% of UIW's undergraduate programs. Several strategies guided the planning of the WA cohorts. The QEP implementation team prioritized programs with faculty who have voiced interest in improving student writing, who can send three members to the academy, and who will be "good ambassadors" for the QEP. In addition, the team sought opportunities to include faculty from the school of Extended Academic Programs (EAP) and to represent disciplines with various pedagogical approaches, including quantitative ones. Finally, the team attempted to assure that revised courses will reach a significant number of students by selecting at least one large program and one large Core course for each WA cohort.

Writing Academy Cohorts

Participating Programs	Rationale
Year 1 – starting Fall 2015 Accounting Criminal Justice FYC (Core) Philosophy (Core) Vision Science	Accounting (one of ten largest majors) Criminal Justice (a new and growing major also taught in ADCaP and UIW Online) FYC (two Core composition courses, taken at UIW by about 50% of graduating seniors) Philosophy (Core course taken by almost all students) Vision Science (a quantitative discipline)
Year 2 – starting Fall 2016 Athletic Training/ Rehabilitative Science Biology Communication Arts/ Journalism History (major) Religious Studies (Core)	Athletic Training (program improvement already in progress) Biology (the largest undergraduate major) Communication Arts / Journalism (program focused on writing) History (has key research sequence) Religious Studies (Core courses taken by almost all students)
Year 3 – starting Fall 2017 BS Business Administration Marketing Atmospheric Science Psychology (major) World Literature (Core)	BSBA (largest major in ADCaP / online) Marketing (one of ten largest majors) Atmospheric Science (quantitative discipline) Psychology (one of ten largest majors) World Literature (Core English course taken by almost all students)
Year 4 – starting Fall 2018 Chemistry / Biochemistry Government & International Affairs History / Sociology (Core) Management Human Resources (EAP)	Chemistry / Biochemistry (second largest science major) Government / International Affairs (course sequences with international focus) History / Sociology (Core courses that impact most incoming first-year students) Management (one of ten largest majors) Human Resources (one of largest EAP majors)

The planned enrollment in the WA is 15 faculty members (three individuals from five different disciplines) each year. WA will run for four years, so it will serve 60 of the 146 full-time faculty members engaged in undergraduate teaching. For several reasons, the QEP implementation team believes that this level of faculty participation can have a significant impact on undergraduate education at UIW.

- The projected 60 faculty participants in WA represent about 40% of the target audience—a somewhat ambitious goal. Miami University of Ohio has perhaps the most well-developed program of faculty learning communities (FLC) in the country and reports that about one-third of its faculty have participated in an FLC.
- Some participants will be representing important general education courses; for example, philosophy and the first-year composition (FYC) sequence are included in the first cohort. About half of UIW's graduating seniors will have taken FYC here, and almost all will have taken Introduction to Philosophy at UIW.
- Many of the Writing Academy participants will be representing a major and the departmental teams will create writing ladders. These disciplines have been chosen strategically to include large programs that touch many students.

The table below uses Fall 2013 enrollment data to illustrate the scope of this approach.

These numbers count the numbers of students in all sections of these programs as of the Fall 2013 census date.

Section Enrollments in Cohort 1 Programs

Academic Program	Enrollment
Accounting	137
Vision Science	61
Criminal Justice	181
Combined Core courses* (Intro. to Philosophy, Comp. I and Comp. II)	628
Total	**1,007**

*This is a deliberately conservative estimate to account for students who enrolled in more than one of these three Core courses. The actual combined enrollment in fall 2013 was 1,399 students: Introduction to Philosophy (628), English Composition I (504), and English Composition II (267).

In Fall 2013, UIW's total undergraduate enrollment (main campus and EAP) was 6420, so if the revised writing ladder courses were in place then, almost 16% of the undergraduates would have participated in some way. This level of participation seems sustainable because many of UIW's largest undergraduate majors will be invited to participate in later years of the project. For example, biology has 538 majors, psychology has 261 majors, and management has 301 majors.

As part of each year-long effort, a cohort of faculty will redesign courses to use writing more effectively and design a strategy to assess their success; these courses will become the writing ladder courses described below. Participants will learn how to use direct measures of student learning, and will ultimately demonstrate that they can score student written work with a rubric adapted to their program. Three faculty members from a single discipline will participate in the academy at the same time so they can construct the writing ladder courses for their program. When appropriate, a member of the EAP faculty from a corresponding program will participate

in WA. Each WA cohort will meet approximately once a month over the academic year. In addition, cohorts from preceding years will serve as consultants to the current WA members and all will gather for a general meeting and evaluation of progress in implementation and refinement of writing ladder courses in May of each QEP year.

Faculty motivation is always a challenge when an academic initiative needs faculty participation. The QEP implementation team has several reasons to believe that faculty from enough programs will participate to have a campus-wide impact.

- The topic selection process indicated widespread faculty concern with student writing. In no major – undergraduate, graduate or professional – did faculty say, "Sure, our students are writing just fine."
- The QEP design recognizes and respects the UIW faculty workload, which includes a nominal load of 4 sections per semester, plus service and scholarly activity. Therefore, a scholarship component is built into WA to assist faculty members in meeting campus scholarship expectations while participating in WA.
- Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) and similar study groups have previously been successful on the UIW campus. The previous QEP included the formation of a FLC that met several times a semester to study effective ways to teach first-year students. The Provost Office has sponsored three summer institutes on Catholic Social Teaching and social justice. In each case, the result was a consistent integration of workshop lessons in syllabi and practice in multiple disciplines.
- The primary hurdle to increasing writing has been perception of the time demands of grading student work. To address that concern, sessions will draw upon sources such as Walvoord's *Assessing and Improving Student Writing in College* and Bean's *Engaging Ideas* for strategies on increasing and improving student writing with a reasonable investment of faculty time.

Writing Ladders: An Important Product of the Writing Academies

The writing ladders are an adaption of the idea of writing-intensive courses. They will use existing UIW courses, already offered on a regular rotation but revised to address writing in a more intentional way. This design was chosen to reflect two important points made in the literature. First, the faculty members in specific disciplines are the experts in the genres and conventions of writing in those disciplines. Second, complex skills like writing develop over time, as a result of instruction, practice and feedback. Typically, the ladders will include courses at the entry, mid- and senior levels; several disciplines with a large presence in the Core curriculum will also participate to work solely on their general education courses. Each program that takes part in WA will include three faculty members from the same discipline; while each faculty will plan a course revision, together their work will comprise the writing ladder for their program. In addition, working together in WA should allow these instructors to create a coherent series of courses with additional impact.

Because the approach taken by this project initially emphasizes faculty development and the revision of course outlines—as opposed to course syllabi—it will be important to find ways to integrate the writing ladder courses into the on-going offerings of the department. In UIW usages

of the terms, a *syllabus* is a very short document, approved by the Undergraduate Council, describing common expectations and outcomes for all sections of the course. In contrast, the *course outline* expands upon the syllabus with a calendar, sets of assignments, policies, and so forth; the course outline is the particular way one instructor delivers the course described by the syllabus. In beginning an effort to broaden and improve writing instruction, the QEP implementation team faced a significant question: would it be better to begin with people, that is, WA faculty and their course outlines, or with structure, that is, with course syllabi? Neither path is without risks, but the implementation team felt that beginning with people is more likely to yield lasting improvement on the UIW campus. There are several reasons for that conviction.

First, UIW has a strong and successful recent history of using faculty development to support enduring change. The previous QEP, for instance, dealt with increasing the engagement of our first-year students. While that QEP invested significant resources in direct services to students, on the faculty side the project emphasized several types of development around teaching strategies; this is a key reason UIW established the Center for Teaching and Learning. This focus on engagement has become institutionalized in the faculty culture, even in faculty hiring and evaluation processes.

Second, despite the institution's continuing growth, most undergraduate majors are of manageable sizes; often there is only one section of the advanced courses within a major, and the largest majors might typically offer two or three sections of these courses. Given this scheduling pattern, it is not difficult to devise a plan to share the new approach with the relevant colleagues. In the final report on their WA experience, participants will be asked to submit both the revised course outline of their own course and a plan for sharing their outline with part-time faculty if that is relevant to their situation. Typically, part-time faculty not only follow the course syllabus, but use a course outline written by a full-time faculty member.

Third, departments have been, and will continue to be, involved in the planning of this initiative, and the ultimate vision of this collaboration is for participating departments to integrate the revised writing ladders into the respective curricula. Department chairs or program coordinators helped to identify the courses and faculty members for the first cohort, and this kind of consultation will continue with the other cohorts. The participants in WA will present their revised course outlines, proposed syllabi, and their assessments of their revised approach to their colleagues at department meetings. If the writing ladder approach seems fruitful after a year of experience, faculty members who have created the writing ladder courses will suggest that the department make any needed changes in these three syllabi.

Two important Core areas are also represented in the first WA cohort, philosophy and the first year composition (FYC) sequence. These courses—which impact every incoming first-year student (about 900 each year)—are taught by as many as 20 full-time and part-time faculty. The strategy for these large Core courses, as well as the Core courses in subsequent cohorts, will be for three full-time faculty members who teach that single course to take part in the academy, with the goal of enhancing the use of writing within that course. Because of differences among departments, Core faculty involved in WA will include in their final report their own plan to share the new approach with part-time faculty also teaching that course.

Finally, the writing ladder approach will be used in many of UIW's largest programs across the college/schools and it will include a common rubric to assess student writing. For those reasons the aggregated rubric results will measure overall UIW student competency in writing, specifically writing competency as expressed in their majors. In particular, while the rubrics used in WA will be tailored to individual courses, the rubrics will still assess student competency in the fundamental writing skills: Purpose, Development, Conventions, Sources and Evidence, Syntax and Mechanics (Appendix 7). This three-layered approach involving the largest majors, the large Core courses, and a common rubric, will allow the aggregation of the rubric scores and the assessment of the core learning outcome of effective written communication.

Detailed Plan for the Writing Academy

WA will be divided into five instructional modules throughout the academic year, beginning in August, and ending in May, even though each cohort will report back to subsequent cohorts and continue to implement new strategies in the following years. Modules are divided into sessions, where participants convene as a group. Each session is followed by independent assignments and assessments, which participants will share at the following session. The purpose of WA is to:

- facilitate faculty learning communities,
- help faculty understand and appreciate the significance of writing in their own disciplines,
- increase awareness of resources available to them inside and outside of the university,
- help faculty develop plans to use writing more effectively in their classes and programs.

Participants will meet regularly in the fall semester as they explore research and strategies of writing and teaching, and will then embark on their own projects in the spring semester (Appendix 8).

Assessing the Writing Academy

While participants in each cohort of WA will be surveyed about their satisfaction with the experience, the most meaningful assessment involves an examination of student work produced in these courses. To do that, in the third year the WA director will obtain samples of senior level writing in non-ladder majors for comparison to writing samples from writing ladder courses. The WA director will organize the actual scoring session, summarize the results of the comparison, and submit a report to the rest of the QEP implementation team along with any suggestions for adjustments in WA programming.