Challenges

I write this as I complete my final year as CWP Director and faculty member at MU. We know that MU faces economic challenges that will likely carry over the next few years. Pedagogically, universities – in general – also face challenges. How do we adapt our current thinking regarding teaching to the demands new technologies pose for communicating? How do we invent new teaching practices that are in line with the various communicative innovations we are experiencing? Can we continue as if nothing has changed?

Sometimes, it feels as if that is how we work. Our teaching must shift with the other communicative and cultural shifts we experience. In the 1960s, media theorist Marshall McLuhan made the same observation regarding university teaching. His argument was based on the emerging influence of satellite communications. Today, we are more than ever in an information age, but our teaching remains the same.
In June, the online journal, *The Morning News*, ran an essay by former English professor Michael Erard entitled “Cheater Cheater.” Erard recounts the one time he caught a student plagiarizing, the punishment he gave her, and then his meeting with her years later to recall the incident. Erard’s story is the prototypical story of the teacher who feels justified in catching a culprit student, who confronts that student, and who eventually reaches a cathartic moment that justifies the cheating punishment previously dished out. Erard’s story is a professorial fantasy.

Plagiarism, the copying of a text without attribution, is at the heart of many professor’s anxieties. Faculty fear that the work they collect and assess is not legitimate. Software companies take advantage of this fear by selling programs like Turnitin.com and Blackboard’s SafeAssign. Such programs scan the Internet for copies and alert the faculty to possible plagiarism.

While plagiarism, of course, does exist, it might be helpful to refocus the attention that faculty place on “catching” students toward pedagogy itself. The hardest question for a faculty member to ask is: how do I teach students the complexities of research and citation? How do I prepare students for the work I expect?

In his essay, “The Scarlet P: Plagiarism, Panopticism, and the Rhetoric of Academic Integrity,” Sean Zwagerman traces the complexities of what we’ve come to call plagiarism and points to some of the instructional failures that facilitate it. Often bound with the desire to catch cheating students is unethical professorial behavior (particularly regarding the usage of plagiarism software) and a lack of attention to pedagogy.

Before resorting to the time consuming software, for instance, or before spending considerable time cutting and pasting student work into Google, instructors should set up time in class to explain the intricacies of citation. Few
students understand some of the basic reasons for citation because few texts actually employ citation. Novels, magazine stories, websites, and newspaper articles are based on research, but writers of such works do not quote texts nor include Works Cited lists.

Why do we cite?

We cite for many reasons.

• To give credit where credit is due (the most common reason)
• To provide context (there is background to what I write about)
• To show the larger conversation (I am not the only person discussing this issue)
• To demonstrate authorial credibility (I have done my research; I know what I am writing about)
• To provide a service to the reader (if you want to know more about this idea, check my Works Cited)

Few students know about these reasons. Without instruction, students will treat citation as an afterthought: “I need to put a few quotes in my paper.” That is exactly what citation is not. Citation is the writing; it is not a supplement to the writing.

Imagine spending a class period explaining these ideas rather than hours running student work through SafeAssign, checking for overlaps, and then discussing findings with students.

In addition to teaching these reasons for citation, instructors should also revisit how they teach research. Too often, we assume that the complexity of research is already understood by students. While research methods differ from discipline to discipline, one method that is often not useful is the generic directive to “go to the library” or to “use the library’s databases.” Such an instruction directs students to a place to find information, but it doesn’t show students how to find information or what to do with it once they find it.

Learning search terminology is helpful, but so are more generalizable strategies that focus on the larger picture. I call one such strategy the category of experience gesture. Students often look for information in the category representative of the search. For example, if one is researching 20th century architectural practices, one looks up the terms “20th century” and “architecture.” This type of search will yield representative information from two specific categories. It will no doubt be helpful. But it is also a limited method.

Information is found in any number of categories, not just the one representing the search. In the case of the above example, we have two categories:

• Architecture
• Time period

But we haven’t looked at the ways this research might uncover valuable ideas in other categories, ideas that will help us shape an understanding of the topic in question:

• Politics
• Media (literature, film, song)
• Science
• Education
• Personal moments
• Etc.

By exploring multiple categories, students can see how ideas play out over different areas of experience. Once they understand, for instance, how 20th century Architectural practices circulate through these different areas of experience, they can begin the next step of research: synthesis.

It is not enough to identify an idea over multiple categories. One must also synthesize what one finds, identify patterns, locate the larger conversation, and then enter into that conversation with a new idea. Otherwise, students are merely plugging in data without an understanding of what their role is in the conversation (and thus, instructors catch “plagiarized” sources unwoven into the text). For this reason, a great deal of writing does not begin with a claim or thesis statement, but instead starts with the collection of material, and out of the synthesis of that material, an idea or claim will be found via pattern recognition.

A popular example might help us. The food magazine Saveur ran a special issue on markets in June. Early in the magazine, the editors present an example of the research process I am describing.
We can identify a number of categories here regarding markets:

- Literature (Zola)
- Art (Piet)
- Poetry (Ginsberg)
- Song (Belafonte)
- Nursery Rhymes (“To Market”)
- Film (The Stepford Wives)

The idea being studied, the market, is represented differently in each category; a different way of thinking frames the idea. These particular categories come from the arts. Together they deal with a non-art concept, the market. We could substitute other categories and get very different examples. Either way, we now have material we can use in a larger project on markets. How we use this material depends on the type of synthesis we do.

In Complexity, A Guided Tour, Melanie Mitchell outlines Charles Darwin’s research similarly. Mitchell describes Darwin’s readings that led to his writing of the Origin of Species:

- Principles of Geology by Charles Lyell
- Essay on the Principle of Population by Thomas Malthus
Here we find three categories – geology, population, economics – that are not directly tied to the object of study – evolution – but that might teach something about such a subject (and of course, these areas did teach Darwin). These examples show research methods. “Go to the library” is not a method but a direction to a place. The problem many students face when doing research is not that they want to cheat, but that they do not have a method. There is a great deal more to this topic regarding how to synthesize, how to weave citations into a body of text, and so on. In another issue of e-WAC, we can address those points as well.

What we shouldn’t do is blame the Internet, call students cheats, or perform another act that diverts attention away from our own pedagogical responsibilities. Piracy (what we are calling plagiarism), as Adrian Johns documents it in his book of the same name, is a historical issue, not a new one. Besides the issues of method I outline above, the act of copying is a complex act. Such a point does not excuse acts of unwarranted copying, but it does put into perspective the ways invention historically functions. To invent, to create, to innovate means to appropriate or to copy. How we do so, i.e., what our method entails, is the issue we need to address. We’ve addressed method as “category” here. In the next issue of e-WAC we can address the question of the copy.

Plagiarism? Or the circulation of an idea over various categories?

Vlad the Impaler Chris Lee The Count Count Chocula
(History) (Film) (Children’s TV) (Commercial Product)

Dracula

In the June 11 Profhacker column, “Preventing Plagiarism,” Amy Cavender advises using online tools like Zotero to help students avoid making plagiarism mistakes (http://chronicle.com/blogPost/Preventing-Plagiarism/24695/). “Zotero is also a marvelous information-management system, and is therefore well-suited to avoiding the accidental plagiarism that results from not keeping good track of one's sources. If students get into the habit of keeping both their sources and their notes in Zotero, they're much less likely to inadvertently neglect to cite a source, or to accidentally cite something as a paraphrase or summary when it's really a direct quote.”
In the last edition of *e-WAC*, I wrote about reasons faculty may have for being either “skeptical” or explicitly resistant to a writing-to-learn and learning-to-write pedagogy. As I mentioned, “skepticism” reflects stances taken by many university faculty throughout the history of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement in spite of well supported theories that justify the value of writing and revision in all disciplinary courses.” As Deborah Swanson-Qwens reports, “In the process of using hand, eye, and brain, [writers] may among other things, sort through ideas, integrate old information with new, and reformulate thoughts.” Accordingly, many educators strongly believe that students from all disciplines must be given as many opportunities as possible to “make meaning” by working with language—by writing, reflecting, and engaging in their own learning processes. In light of these beliefs, however, we still find rampant resistance to WAC, and it is an important issue because (arguably) such resistance can be a catalyst for the actual demise of WAC Programs.

Faculty engagement—even more than administrative dictates—has been shown to be the most important force in programmatic longevity and success. This is not to say that administration, because they hold the purse strings, cannot shut down programs. They can and do. But without “faculty enthusiasm [for establishing] writing as a teaching and learning tool” (McLeod, 1988) WAC programs will die along with all the opportunities students could have had to be introduced to ongoing scholarly conversations across university campuses (Maimon, 1983).

Thus, because WAC has been shown to enrich students’ learning opportunities by incorporating writing into the classroom, it is legitimate to ask why faculty would resist adopting such system.

Faculty from geography, mathematics, chemistry, agriculture, hard sciences, social sciences, etc. are most attuned to a pedagogy that involves lecturing, objective testing, and laboratory experiments. Although they recognize, and often expound on, their students’ lack of writing abilities, busy academics—expected to conduct research, teach, get tenured, and offer service to their institutions—are not always interested in incorporating writing assignments into their classes. When this disinterest transforms itself into actual resistance, these faculty, often unwittingly, set up the ironic situation of lamenting student writing skills while foregoing the opportunity to improve those skills and, of course, increase disciplinary knowledge. And at times, they have sound reasons.
Resistance in the Age of Specialization

To begin with, composition scholars have found valid grounds for cross-disciplinary faculty avoidance of using writing as a learning/thinking tool. According to David Russell (1999) and others, university faculty do not see writing as a “central” pedagogical focus because they do not see the ways that encouraging better writing among their students connects to “advancing the value and status of their disciplines—and of their own individual careers” (emphasis added). Indeed, teachers at the post-secondary level are rarely rewarded for the extra work of a writing intensive course. The energy expended does not help get tenure, promotion, or more money. But Russell is not talking about immediate, concrete benefits here, even though those are genuine reasons for faculty resistance. On a more nuanced level, he is referring to the notion that “[f]aculty are separated by compartmentalization of disciplinarians and knowledge disciplinary divisions” (Mahala and Swilky, 1994). In other words, so many faculty are weighed down with being experts in their fields that they cannot be diverted by questions about the “nature of knowledge, academic ‘objectivity,’ and tactics of disciplinary socialization” (Mahala and Swilky, 1994), which are questions that writing specialists know should arise in any pedagogical context. The “nature of knowledge” goes beyond the technical advice or knowledge of a discipline. It reaches into the realm of deep learning, of being able to “think” in ways that attach meaning to content. Once again we venture into writing, the process of recognizing that genuine learning is being able to represent our thoughts and feelings with symbols and signs. Obviously, academics would not be interested in being alleviated of the “burden” of being “expert” in their field. This is what they work toward every day. In terms of effective curricula, however, WAC proponents call for putting this expertise to work in ways that fully realize the negotiations students must make between competing discourses and enhancing their opportunities to “go beyond merely technical” learning, the type of learning advocated by what Mahala and Swilky call “dominant disciplinary cultures.”
When faculty do not take time to comprehend the extent to which students must navigate being “students” and writing academically; being “thinkers” and realizing how various disciplines play into ways of thinking; and being potential “professionals” working at a career of their choice, then naturally these faculty will find it difficult to see value in those extra—and sometimes arduous—teaching tasks that incorporate writing into the classroom. For example, in terms of navigating more than one discipline, a good case can be made for incorporating science and science education with the humanities “via writing across the curriculum projects that address ideology” and the “neglected humanistic aspects of [scientific disciplines, such as] values, dominant beliefs, and societal influences. . . . Learning the discursive practices of many disciplines at once (as undergraduate students are called upon to do) is never a simple linear process of socialization,” (Mahala and Swilky, 1994) Ironically, complicating a pedagogy with questions of ideology and value can actually dissolve resistance for hard science faculty. As Bonnie Spanier, a Molecular Biologist, says “Writing across the curriculum projects that address ideology in the discourse and practice of science are potentially transformative and help alleviate . . . the crisis in scientific literacy in the United States, and the vast gulf between scientific experts and the public in issues of science and society” (Mahala and Swilky, 1994). Perhaps, then, one solution to the problem of faculty resistance to using writing to learn is raising consciousness of the part writing plays in helping students see themselves as productive members of both the scientific and public communities.

Another type of faculty resistance to WAC happens when satisfying the urge to cover a set amount of disciplinary content trumps giving students opportunities to write like the professionals they will become—in the field for which they are training. Faculty often state that they have no time to spend on one or two papers, including review and revision, because they must get through a specified amount of material. Other faculty, however, feel that sticking to the traditional “must-get-through” this textbook regime shortchanges students’ professional prospects.

For example, pedagogical theories on how to teach engineering are often based on lecturing, then testing theories and formulas, and then taking tests to show learning outcomes. Engineering faculty are notoriously resistant to incorporating writing into courses, and their resistance follows similar lines to those found in many other “non-language arts” areas of expertise. To echo a most common objection, “We just don’t have time to bring in another teaching strategy and still cover the content we are expected to cover. Besides, I’m not a writing teacher and do not want to have to read all those papers.” But if we go beyond the strictly technical “knowing,” we will recognize what one Mechanical/ Aerospace engineering faculty sees as the complex and genuine benefit of conflating technical expertise with deep learning. He articulates these benefits in terms of ways that writing skillfully means “thinking”
critically and connects these processes with what engineers need to learn to accomplish the most concrete task of all, to get a job, keep it, and advance in it.

In his syllabus, he reinforces the idea that skillful writing is essential for any successful engineer by telling students their future employers will require the kind of critical, independent thinking and communication skills that can be honed by writing. Connecting writing to students’ future careers is essential for student engagement, so this teacher notes that “Conventional classroom assignments do not represent the real world. Your boss won’t give you quizzes, problem sets, or exams. You will deal with open-ended problems and issues . . . situations [requiring] higher-level critical thinking, not a ‘plug and chug’ approach” (Krawitz, 2009). And so these engineering students learn to “present ideas, arguments, and analyses” by learning to write affective memos, reports, planning documents, justifications, and other documents essential to the world of engineering.

All of this talk of resistance is not to malign faculty who continue to take seriously their responsibilities for delivering necessary lecture material and for working with majors as individuals. Faculty who are not trained specifically in Language Arts legitimately should not be expected to “teach writing.” Incorporating more papers and revision of those papers does, indeed, take time away from covering any predetermined, quantifiable amount of content.

It is more work to read and respond to papers.

When we reflect on ways writing helps foster learning on so many levels, we can better understand our responsibility for insuring that college graduates will think critically, communicate effectively, and curtail tendencies to resist solid, in-place WAC pedagogies. Hopefully.
References


Paths to Satisfying the WI

By Catherine Chmidling

Routes to Satisfying the WI Requirements – Some Narrow, Some Wide

I have been interested for some time in the variety of WI courses (or lack thereof) available to students when selecting the WIs for their degree plans. For situations in which students take a WI course as an elective rather than a requirement due to course content, I want to know if there is sufficient WI course variety so that they can select a topic of genuine interest rather than take a course solely for the WI flag. For WI courses required for a degree plan, I want to know if there is sufficient seating capacity and that the required WI course does not form a bottleneck for degree completion. As part of CWP’s current networked self-assessment, I recently collected and presented data at the International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference in Bloomington, IN (May 20-22, 2010) on WI enrollment for each MU College.

The General Education requirements at MU stipulate that undergraduate students must take at least 3 credit hours of Writing Intensive – typically one WI course. The Gen Ed WI requirement does not specify the level of the course nor whether the course is an elective or within the student’s declared major, so this WI requirement is commonly called the lower-division requirement and is assumed to be an elective. The Graduation requirements stipulate that each undergraduate must take at least one upper division (3000-level or above) WI in his/her declared major. This is commonly referred to as the upper-division requirement, is often a course required for the major’s degree plan (frequently Capstone), and is commonly thought to be taken after the Gen Ed-required WI, though there is no mandated order in which the 6 credit hours (typically two WI courses) are taken. Students must pass WI courses with a C+ grade or higher to receive the WI credit.

The Colleges and Schools for Undergraduate Education at MU

Last year I asked academic advisors from across the colleges about any WI variety or availability difficulties they might have had, and received very few anecdotal accounts of insufficient numbers or seating capacity of WI courses. Because MU is experiencing yet another record-breaking freshman class, I wanted to double-check the sufficiency or insufficiency of WI courses with quantitative data. The data below show the varied ways in which colleges have approached and satisfied the WI requirements over the past
two academic years. Despite the lack of complaints we receive regarding the variety or availability of WI courses, I worry about students taking WI courses for the WI flag rather than interest in the course topic, and whether WI seating unavailability could create a bottleneck for degree completion in some majors. I've listed the number of WI courses offered by each college, the seating capacity in those WI courses, their Census Day enrollments, and vacant seats as of Census Day. The vacancies do not account for courses which are restricted to majors or have multiple degree-specific prerequisites. I calculated vacant seats solely by subtracting Census Day enrollment from each course's declared enrollment cap. I hope to look into the issue of WI seating availability further in the future by repeating this comparison while distinguishing those WI courses which have specific prerequisites or are restricted to majors and those which are relatively open to enrollment regardless of major or preceding coursework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th># WI courses</th>
<th>WI capacity</th>
<th>WI enrollment</th>
<th>WI enrollment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ag, Food &amp; Nat Res.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2062</td>
<td>1720</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>4822</td>
<td>4296</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>762</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>279</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>886</td>
<td>537</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Professions</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>284</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Environ. Sci.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1849</td>
<td>1608</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1136</td>
<td>1081</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>130</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honors/Provost</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>201</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>12901</td>
<td>10898</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th># WI courses</th>
<th>WI capacity</th>
<th>WI enrollment</th>
<th>WI vacancies</th>
<th>WI % filled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ag, Food &amp; Nat Res.</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1772</td>
<td>1535</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>86.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Sciences</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>5423</td>
<td>4952</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>91.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>99.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>64.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>79.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Professions</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>68.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Environ. Sci.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1915</td>
<td>1859</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>97.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>952</td>
<td>903</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>94.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>67.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honors/Provost</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>64.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>13305</td>
<td>11807</td>
<td>1498</td>
<td>88.74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The WI courses are on average approximately 85-89% filled across the University, and anecdotal responses from academic advisors suggest that the WI courses do not present a bottleneck for most students’ degree completion (based on the absence of complaints). However, for those colleges with their WI courses filled at or above 90% - Arts & Sciences, Business, Human Environmental Sciences, and Journalism - it may be worthwhile for CWP to consult with academic advisors and departmental chairs regarding departmental interest in and feasibility of increasing the number of WI courses offered.

To place into context the varying quantities of WI courses available in the different colleges, I also compared the number of and enrollment in WI courses within each college to the total numbers of courses and students in each college, realizing that students frequently take courses outside their home college. Students enrolled in a WI course in a given college may not have a declared major in the same college. I used CWP final data on WI courses and WI enrollment for Fall 2009, as Fall 2010 enrollment data will not be complete until after Census Day. Data on total course offerings for each college is not a statistic regularly published by Institutional Research or Student Information Systems; however, so I have only the Fall 2010 data on total MU college offerings. I am presuming that the quantities of courses offered in a given fall semester do not change much from year to year. I calculated the percentage of courses in each college which carry the WI flag relative to the total number of courses offered in the college. I also calculated the percentage of students taking a WI course in each college relative to the total students declared as majors in each college. Despite the year difference between WI course data and MU total course data and the certainty that students enroll in WI courses outside of their home colleges, I think the comparison shows some interesting relationships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College / School</th>
<th>Fall 2009 WI Courses Held (#)</th>
<th>Fall 2010 Total UG Courses</th>
<th>Fall 2009 WI Students Enrolled (#)</th>
<th>Fall 2009 Total MU Students</th>
<th>WI % of Total Classes</th>
<th>WI % of Total Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ag, Food &amp; Nat Res.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>751</td>
<td>2237</td>
<td>4.48%</td>
<td>33.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>1355</td>
<td>2,314</td>
<td>8715</td>
<td>5.17%</td>
<td>26.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>3945</td>
<td>3.27%</td>
<td>10.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>1231</td>
<td>2.55%</td>
<td>15.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>2135</td>
<td>4.85%</td>
<td>18.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Professions</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>1175</td>
<td>7.98%</td>
<td>21.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Environ. Sci.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>763</td>
<td>1291</td>
<td>3.53%</td>
<td>59.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>12.63%</td>
<td>19.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>891</td>
<td>4.17%</td>
<td>5.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honors / Provost</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>4.94%</td>
<td>20.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>3321</td>
<td>5571</td>
<td>23869</td>
<td>5.15%</td>
<td>23.34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The roughly 170 WI courses in a given fall semester represent 2.5 to 12.5% of the total courses offered in a college in that semester. The University-wide average is 5.15%. However, 6% to almost 60% of the undergraduate population is enrolled in WI courses across the colleges every semester. The University-wide average of students enrolled in WI courses is 23% of the undergraduate population in a single semester, or almost 47% per academic year.

The percentage of a college's courses designated as WI does not seem directly related to the percentages at which those WI courses are filled. For example, the WI courses available in the College of Education represent 2.55% of that college's available courses, but are filled at a roomy 65-73% of capacity. Although the WI courses offered in Education are the smallest percentage across campus of WI courses relative to all of a college's undergraduate courses, they appear to meet the College's needs with plenty of room for additional enrollment (25-35% of available capacity) in future years. In contrast, the School of Journalism’s WI courses represent 12.6% of the School’s total offered courses – the highest relative percentage of WI courses to total undergraduate courses in any college on campus. Nevertheless, Journalism’s WI courses are filled to 95% of their capacity. Assuming that Journalism will experience the increased enrollments currently documented for the last few years' freshman classes, I believe that developing additional WI courses (by adapting more existing courses to WI) would be prudent to ensure sufficient WI seating availability in future semesters.

In past years CWP policy has stressed that we do not actively recruit instructors to offer their courses as WI, but prefer to leave that decision to the department and individual faculty member. While I strongly agree that we should continue to avoid pressing faculty to teach courses as WI when they do not wish to, I believe CWP should begin actively working in cooperation with deans, department chairs, and academic advisors to determine areas of each college's curricula – particularly Arts & Sciences, Business, Human Environmental Sciences, and Journalism – in which additional WI courses would ease enrollment pressure on existing WI courses filled at or beyond capacity and so reduce the risk of forcing students to delay graduation.

Approximately one half of the entire MU undergraduate population, nearly 12,000 students out of almost 24,000, are enrolled in WI courses every year. CWP program staff, faculty Board members, and our incredibly dedicated WI instructors (nearly 300 each year) are doing much more than helping students check off a requirement on their way to graduation. While every course in a degree plan is vital in a student’s education, the WI courses, which are specifically charged with teaching broadly transferable skills of critical thinking and clear communication grounded in disciplinary content, help students become more discerning global citizens, and teach them the skills to make themselves, their arguments, and their passions understood across their current career path, their hobbies, and the future careers they don’t yet know they’ll enter. Given the scope of the student population involved in the WI courses, and the importance of the transferable thinking and communicating skills learned in the WI courses, I believe it is important that CWP take proactive measures to ensure that the WI courses provide sufficient variety and seating capacity to meet the demands of MU’s growing undergraduate population.
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Winners will present their papers at Ellis Library, and will have video of their presentations and their papers archived in MOspace, MU’s digital repository.

• All majors are eligible.
• The research paper must be between 7 and 20 pages in length and be written within a year of the deadline date by a current MU undergraduate student for an MU course.
• The deadline for submission of all materials is February 25, 2011.

More details on the contest can be found at: http://mulibraries.missouri.edu/about/researchcontest.htm

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