A Distributed Approach to MU’s Upper Division Writing Intensive Requirement

The Four-Course WI Requirement in the Department of Geological Sciences

Rationale for Changing our Upper Division WI Course Requirement

Potentially Available Upper Division WI Core Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Credits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sedimentology (3800)</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structural Geology (4150)</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Igneous &amp; Metamorphic Petrology (4900)</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plate Tectonics (4950)</td>
<td>3 credits</td>
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Structural Geology served as our upper division WI course

Typical enrollment of 10-15 students. Course assignments included numerous problem sets in addition to the weekly 2-hour lab sessions and associated reports.

Writing components included:
- Three writing assignments with graduated complexity/depth throughout the semester that were revised by the students.
- Professor, Lab TA, and student peer reviews – leading to assignment revisions.
- Laboratory synthesis report – not revised.

All WI course criteria were accommodated.

Our Concerns and Problems that had to be Addressed

- Making writing components at least 30% of the course grade significantly reduced grade% associated with the lab, problem sets, and lecture exams.
- Student workload far exceeded that in other upper division courses.
- The extra faculty workload made it hard to find faculty teaching other core courses who were willing to participate in the WI program.

Our Solution

In 2004, we proposed to the Campus Writing Board that we be allowed to distribute our upper division B.S. writing intensive instruction among our four upper division core courses.

Our Basic Premises

- Students would benefit from broader exposure to writing in multiple courses with multiple professors.
- More faculty involvement in the WI program would promote the importance of student writing.

Changes We Made

- Spread our upper division WI requirement for the B.S. over four core courses (10-20 students/course).
- There are fewer writing assignments/course, but more total writing assignments (and pages written).
- Department-funded teaching assistants help faculty during the review process.
- One responsible faculty member coordinates the program.

Things that Remained the Same

- There is a progression in assignment complexity from the early, Jr. year, courses to the Sr. year courses.
- All CWP writing intensive criteria are met or exceeded over the four-course sequence.

Advantages of this Approach

- Students receive greater breadth of writing experiences from more faculty members.
- More faculty members are involved in improving student’s writing skills, and committed to WI program.
- Distributes the workload of faculty members involved in teaching writing skills within our curriculum.
- Allows for 10-15% grading from writing in each course, not detracting from other course material.

Criteria for WI Course Designation

- All WI courses must meet criteria that are established by the Campus Writing Board. Courses are reviewed for approval by a discipline specific subcommittee of the board.

Criteria for WI course approval includes:
1. Courses should be designed and taught by faculty at a 20:1 student-to-faculty ratio.
2. Courses should include multiple assignments that involve substantive revision.
3. Course writing, including revisions, should total at least 6000 words (20 pages).
4. Each course should include at least one assignment involving multiple interpretations.
5. Writing assignments for the course should be distributed throughout the semester.
6. Written assignments should typically constitute at least 30% of the course grade.
7. Faculty may use teaching assistants to maintain ≥ 20:1 student-to-faculty ratio, but
8. Professors should remain in control of assignments, grading, and marking of papers.

Participants

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