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Requiring a Second Writing Course:
A Survey of
Colleges and Universities in the United States

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What exactly does the term "Second Writing Requirement" mean? Is there any standard definition? Until quite recently, many professors on American campuses would have answered these questions with vague explanations, probably viewing the whole thing as an administrative problem.

Yet, as early as 1980, educators in colleges and universities across the country recognized the need to reinforce and improve students' writing skills beyond the freshman level. The rationale for the addition of this requirement was that many students often did little critical writing during their four years of college after completing the freshman composition course. Further, there was increasing evidence that these students' writing skills often deteriorated rather than improved during their college education.

As a result, a number of schools began to implement junior/senior writing programs revising degree requirements to include advanced writing in a wide range of disciplines. Until the present study, however, no extensive research has concentrated on this trend, and no clear picture exists defining the scope of this curriculum development or the various approaches to the teaching of these advanced composition courses.

This study, conducted in 1986 at the University of Delaware, presents the findings of a survey of the nation's colleges and universities and offers significant information concerning the nature of second writing courses. The research provides information on pedagogical theories, classroom methodology, course materials, and grading procedures. Because of the increasing emphasis on writing across the curriculum, the findings also focus on the staffing of these advanced writing classes and furnish evidence of the current involvement of instructors from disciplines other than English departments in the nation's schools of higher education.

Although the idea of contacting every single school in the country for a survey of this kind appeared the most thorough approach and therefore the most appealing, the logistics as well as the amount of time involved in a study of current trends seemed inadvisable. Rather, the importance of getting a more immediate, general overview of the extent of second writing in each of the fifty states proved preferable and rested on the following premises:

1. Statistical material would firm up the extent and shape of these courses.
2. Dissemination of the findings would focus national attention on the second writing experience.
3. Publication of a sampling of a number of existing

writing programs would serve as an excellent source for models for those schools now considering such a degree requirement.

In any national survey, the method of research and the selection of participants are always critical to the findings of the research. Colleges and universities chosen for this study fall into five categories:

1. Public universities
2. Private universities
3. Public colleges
4. Private colleges
5. Colleges of the armed services

The survey includes a total number of 252 schools or an average of five schools per state. As closely as possible, the selection of schools covers the five groups for each state. Since this survey deals with upper-division composition, all polled schools offer four-year degree programs. Each school received the identical packet of materials including a cover letter of explanation; a one-page questionnaire; a request for additional information (if applicable) concerning the school's involvement in second writing; and a self-addressed, stamped envelope for returning the information. Response was excellent, and answers revealed an enthusiastic interest in the results of the research.

Of the 252 schools surveyed, 38% had second writing programs well in place in 1986. Of the remaining 62% of schools, 40% have no firmed-up plans to implement second writing requirements. Yet, 22% of these institutions of higher learning are considering such a requirement or are actually working on its design and future implementation.

On a state-by-state basis, the survey shows that twenty-eight states have at least one academic institution requiring upper-division composition. Further analysis reveals that in most of these states, where the state university requires a second writing experience, other universities and colleges, both private and state-funded, also tend to include the curriculum requirement. For example, Virginia, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and California fall into this category.

While theoretical views on the current teaching of writing reflect some variation as to practical application, most schools involved in the survey favor the heuristic theory of writing. That is, there appears to be a consensus that students need to improve written communication skills through an emphasis on problem solving. All schools report the view that writing as a process is a much more meaningful and effective technique than writing with the idea of product as a goal. Therefore, regardless of the major thrust of a proposed course, current theory stresses that students write to learn rather than learn to write and that the process of writing in itself engenders thinking, stimulation, and interest in subject matter.

Student/teacher conferencing is, of course, a significant part of this approach to the teaching of writing as are both peer and group tutoring, all sources of a critical audience for ideas

expressed in written form. Few schools expect advanced writing teachers to deal with problems such as grammatical or mechanical problems. In fact, most schools expect students to have mastered these areas in freshman composition. Of the schools surveyed, 82% refer students who still exhibit basic problems in composition to campus support systems such as writing centers or other tutorial services.

Surveyed schools with second writing programs, for the most part, offer a variety of courses reflecting three major categories of advanced writing: 1) technical writing, 2) business writing, and 3) advanced expository writing. Predictably, the study reveals that while the majority of schools allow students a choice of courses for fulfilling the requirement, technical writing courses are most often linked to disciplines such as engineering, nursing, and the hard sciences. The survey also indicates that more often than not, these disciplines first request the advanced writing requirement so that students will graduate with an ability to write within specific methods of discourse. Similarly, business writing courses draw the largest number of students from the economics, business management, and accounting majors. As might be expected, humanities students tend to opt for advanced expository writing. However, it is noteworthy that although expository writing courses normally involve students in the range of standard rhetorical modes, all three categories of advanced writing courses place a strong emphasis on the art of persuasion.

A high percentage of schools (72%) limit class enrollment in junior/senior writing courses to 25-30 students, and a grade of "C" is required in 78% of schools polled, a fact which indicates the seriousness with which administrators view this curriculum requirement. Grading is most often an individual judgment on the part of the instructor, yet a few schools report that students are graded by more than one professor. In such cases, the professor acts as a coach, a helper or collaborator in the process of writing rather than a judge, thereby allowing the student more freedom of self-expression.

Those schools with established programs have all experienced the problems of staffing and budgeting which are inherent in the implementation of an upper-division composition program. Idealistically, the teaching of writing to juniors and seniors across the disciplines would best be served by writing courses related to specific majors and taught by professors in those departments. Historically, however, writing courses have been linked to English departments with the idea that writing is the special domain of professors of English.

The argument that students' interest in writing is enhanced by assignments connected to their own majors cannot be gainsaid. Yet, departments other than English generally react negatively to such a proposal, and professors often feel overburdened with writing correction loads added to discipline course content. Several schools report that writing workshops prepared for professors across the curriculum are poorly attended and that even three or four positive attitudes resulting from a campus-wide workshop seem

rewarding.

Concerning this issue, the research indicates that while most schools attempt to predicate the requirement from a cross-curriculum standpoint, the major burden of designing, implementing, and teaching these courses falls on English departments. Junior writing programs are staffed primarily by part-time faculty usually under the direction of one or two full-time faculty members of the English department. In most cases, these faculty are a part of the school's writing program. Findings reveal that less than 3% of professors of literature become involved with advanced composition courses offered to cross-discipline students.

One particularly interesting development occurring in a number of schools is the writing intensive course which students take in connection with their own majors. These courses, labeled "W," are currently offered in three different forms among the schools responding to the survey. After a course proposal in any major receives approval as a "W" course, the academic deans and faculty senate adopt one of the following criteria:

1. Students sign up for a "W" course which will provide both discipline content and sufficient writing to meet the curriculum requirement.
2. Students sign up for a course in a major other than English and also a related one-credit writing lab. In large lecture classes, professors may limit the number of "W" students they accept for enrollment, since they are responsible for coaching these students throughout the course in written assignments geared to discipline content.
3. In other instances, students may enroll in a course in their major and also in a related writing course. Here, they are working with six credits and two professors: one in the major discipline and one an English teacher. Therefore, students are engaged in writing papers which reflect their expertise in expressing ideas in the accepted discourse of the discipline.

The Writing Certification Examination appears to be the newest development in the national effort to graduate students who are competent in writing. Although only a small percentage of surveyed schools report current use of this examination procedure, a scattering of institutions expressed interest in some kind of midway checkpoint of student writing and indicated that the issue was earmarked for a future agenda. Of those exams now in use, the examination is administered in the following two ways:

1. The certification examination does not exempt students from the second writing requirement. It is an essay exam given in the second semester of the sophomore year to determine which students need further help with basic English before moving into upper-division composition.
2. The certification essay examination given at the end of the sophomore year does exempt students from further writing courses.

As might be presumed, schools with second writing programs are much involved with computer use in advanced writing classes. Most often, computer competence is expected of upper-division students who have had the advantage of their schools' freshman computer writing programs. Several schools report that students are required to own their own computers. All schools boast of campus locations for personal computers and main frame terminals. Generally, however, completed survey questionnaires reflect the awareness that more computers are necessary for successful writing programs and that budget proposals for more terminals are under consideration. Responses with regard to computer use indicate that teachers feel computer writing encourages interest and creativity.

As a final conclusion of this research, it seems clear that the second writing requirement has established firm roots in the academic world and that an increasing number of colleges and universities will add the degree requirement to core curriculum. It is hoped that the following articles, written by teachers and administrators involved with upper-division composition, will serve as a sampling of various approaches to the design and implementation of second writing programs. These articles offer invaluable, detailed information on such matters as theoretical ideas, the setting-up and implementation of a second writing curriculum requirement, cross-curriculum methodology, classroom activities and course content, computer use in advanced composition courses, certification examinations, and classroom staffing. Because these articles have been collected from colleges and universities of various sizes and student populations throughout the country, together they should act as an excellent source of models of second writing programs currently offered in this country.

A GEOGRAPHICAL VIEW OF THE SECOND WRITING REQUIREMENT IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

