

# Writing Subcommittee

Initial Report | January 31, 2022

Bacc Core 2.1 Committee

## Premises

Committee members all share a strong belief that development of writing skills is essential to a quality education, and that OSU students both need and deserve quality writing instruction. We also recognize that WR II is part of the Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer degree (AAOT), and that our decisions therefore carry implications for higher education beyond Oregon State University. Our initial report is submitted with the expectation that additional research-informed conversations about supporting student writing development will continue as the Bacc Core 2.1 committee completes its charge.

## Summary

At this preliminary stage, the Writing Subcommittee recommends that Bacc Core Revision co-chairs know the following going into the roadshows:

**Subcommittee members agree that WIC should remain an explicit component of the Bacc Core, though whether its associated credits should be included in the Bacc Core total credits merits further deliberation.**

**Subcommittee members agree that OSU students need quality writing practice, feedback, and instruction beyond what they receive in WR I and WIC.**

- a. Several committee members are curious to learn more about the current delivery of WR II and viable alternatives before submitting a specific recommendation on how those needs might be met.
- b. For any template that does not have WR II as a stand-alone category, units should be apprised that their faculty will be responsible for all writing instruction after WR 121.
- c. In soliciting feedback from roadshow participants about Writing requirements, the subcommittee members assume that the co-chairs (1) will implement sound, objective methods, and (2) will complement any crowd-sourced input with information from peer-reviewed scholarship and Bacc Core program assessments.

## WR II Exploration

Subcommittee members agreed that it is valuable to consider options for strengthening connections between WR II courses and students' majors, and in doing so, improve the transfer of writing skills and knowledge to new contexts. Our guiding question for this exploration is: How can the Bacc Core Reform process help better connect and contextualize the development of writing skills within students' majors?

- The subcommittee co-chairs have agreed to seek out initiatives and programs that excel in connecting 200- and 300-level writing courses with major-specific skills to aid in this benchmarking, and to assemble relevant scholarship on the topic.
  - One proposal offered in our first meeting is to consider co-taught courses that pair a discipline content-specialist with a trained writing specialist; the subcommittee will continue to discuss what this might entail, both structurally and curricularly.
  - Another alternative discussed was applying a WIC-like model at the mid-stage of students' education by instructors across the university teach writing in their major-specific courses. Questions were raised about how faculty hired to teach in one discipline would be trained,

supported, and assessed in teaching writing in such a way that it will serve students who may still change majors, along with those who stay in those majors. Other questions we will explore include what degree of structural change (e.g., smaller course sizes, professional development, programmatic oversight, etc.) would be needed to support this shift.

- The subcommittee will continue exploring these alternatives and considering others, and it also will consider possibilities for improving our existing WR II framework. The co-chairs will track and share the insights and collective recommendations of the subcommittee.

Subcommittee members request more information regarding two additional areas: (1) what employers are saying regarding written communication, and (2) how the current WR II requirement is fulfilled.

- In addition to subcommittee members' own research, co-chairs will consult on questions related to WR II learning outcomes, program assessment, and pedagogical approaches, as well as try to provide relevant data on written communication in the workplace.

## Broader Context

The following is a distilled account of key information this subcommittee took into consideration during its deliberations:

- According to the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) specifies that **“writing intensive” courses are a high-impact practice** “whose positive impact on students has been established by educational research.”<sup>1</sup>
- The AAC&U has also found that these high-impact practices **particularly benefit underserved students, and that “the effect of these practices on the grades of students of color is even more dramatic”** than for other students. Writing classes are especially vital for students who come from underprepared backgrounds, who are learning English as an additional language, or whose home dialects of English differ from that used and valued in academic settings (sometimes known as “Standard Written English” or “Academic English”).
- Writing classes **correlate with retention and graduation.**<sup>3</sup>
- **89% of employers want writing to be given “more emphasis.”**<sup>4</sup> The report, *Assessing Underserved Students' Engagement in High-Impact Practices*, similarly shows that **90% of employers think written communication is important, but only 44% think graduates are “very well prepared.”**<sup>5</sup> These figures are echoed in the 2021 “How College Contributes to Workforce Success,” in which 90% of surveyed employers rank “ability to communicate through writing” as “very” or “somewhat” important.<sup>6</sup> The Engineering and Technology Industry Council's Employer Survey ranks “written communication” in the top three traits deemed “‘extremely’ or ‘very important,’” yet registered low satisfaction with graduates' skills and knowledge in that area.<sup>7</sup>
- **OSU faculty value writing**, as evidenced by the BCC 2.0 Research – Themes provided via padlet, and in Bacc Core 2.1 committee conversations held during the retreat and subsequent meetings. The conviction that writing skills are essential to a quality education, and that OSU students both need and deserve quality writing instruction can be seen in previous Bacc Core discussions as well. The 2010 report, “Vitalization of General Education at Oregon State University,” for example, affirms OSU's commitment to course access in core skills such as writing.

## Additional Resources

<sup>1</sup>Association of American Colleges and Universities. *The LEAP Vision for Learning: Outcomes, Practices, Impact, and Employers' Views*. Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2011.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>See Garrett, Nathan, et al. "How Student Performance in First-Year Composition Predicts Retention and Overall Student Success." *Retention, Persistence, and Writing Programs*, edited by Todd Christopher Ruecker et al., Utah State University Press, 2017, pp. 93–113; McHenry, Linda. "First Year Composition and Fall-to-Fall Retention." *Assessment Update*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2014, pp. 11–12.

<sup>4</sup>Association of American Colleges and Universities. *The LEAP Vision for Learning: Outcomes, Practices, Impact, and Employers' Views*. Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2011.

<sup>5</sup>Finley, Ashley, and Tia McNair. *Assessing Underserved Students' Engagement in High-Impact Practices*. Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2013

<sup>6</sup> <https://dgm81phvh63.cloudfront.net/content/user-photos/Research/PDFs/AACUEmployerReport2021.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Duchi, Anji, and Bruce Schafer, Engineering & Technology Industry Council, Employer Survey, 2013.