THE TRINITY COLLEGE 'W' CODE

From the "Report of the University Writing Program Task Force" (Curriculum 2000)

Goals and Objectives:

The goal of Writing in the Discipline courses is…developing a student's skills: 1) to integrate and synthesize information and ideas; and 2) to formulate arguments within the conventions and modes of inquiry and evidence that characterize specific academic disciplines. Rather than merely adding writing assignments to course expectations, Writing in the Discipline [courses are] specifically designed to improve student writing and, in the process, strengthen student capacity for intellectual inquiry.

From the bulletin

"Effective writing is central to both learning and communication. To function successfully in the world, students need to be able to write clearly and effectively. To accomplish this, they need to have a sustained engagement with writing throughout their undergraduate career… Through [Writing in the Disciplines] courses students become familiar with the various modes and genres of writing used within an academic discipline and learn how the conventions and expectations for writing differ among the disciplines."

What qualifies a course for a W mode of inquiry?

It is important to recognize that there are many courses at Duke that involve considerable student writing but do not fit the guidelines— courses, for example, in which the only substantive writing project was a term paper turned in at the end of the semester or courses in which writing is used primarily as a means of evaluation rather than providing substantive occasions for students to discuss and improve their work as writers. The key is to imagine a course in which the student writing is itself one focus of study. So long as that criterion is met, our hope is that faculty will develop courses that are diverse in the topics they explore, the forms of critical and scholarly writing they encourage, and the modes of inquiry, research, and conversation they provoke.

Guidelines for WID Courses

The aim of the Writing-in-the-Disciplines program is to engage undergraduates in writing as a form of critical inquiry and scholarly research. This means that the work students do as writers needs to be a visible and integral part of a writing-designated course. Students in such courses should thus expect to:

Write frequently throughout the term

Students should be given regular practice in and comments on their writing. Assignments might take various forms, including, for instance, a series of brief response papers, or several mid-length papers, or a longer research project divided into sections.

Discuss the work they are doing as writers at various points during the term

Students might present papers seminar-style to the class, collaborate on assignments, post research on the web, or otherwise read and respond to one another's work.

Reflect on and improve their work as writers

Students might revise some of their writings in response to comments from their instructor, or write a series of papers in response to a set of linked topics or issues, or draft proposals for or submit sections of longer projects, or expand short response papers into longer essays.

Consider the roles and uses of writing in the discipline they are studying

Students might analyze the structures of various genres of writing (critical essay, lab report, research article, policy memo, etc.), become familiar with standard forms of documentation, or discuss some of the characteristic styles of argument and discourse in the field.

To help the Course Committee approve your proposal for a W code, address these issues in your proposal:

Centrality of writing to the course
The committee is looking for sustained attention to writing; this could range from a single large writing project that students work on in stages throughout the term to a number of shorter papers distributed over the semester. Are students working on writing *throughout* the semester rather than only at one or two moments during the course?

Feedback
The committee will be looking to see that students will be getting effective and timely feedback.[1] Does your proposal include a plan ensuring that students will get useful feedback on their written work, with adequate opportunities for them to *apply* that feedback to their work during the course—either through multiple drafts or in a series of closely-related projects?

Disciplinarity
To become strong and flexible writers, our students need to learn that many characteristics and conventions of writing are dependant on context. And your students are more likely to produce the kind of writing *you* expect if you make your expectations explicit. Does your proposal specify the *particular* kind(s) of writing students will be doing (historiographic essay, case study, policy memo, book review essay, grant proposal, op-ed, etc.), rather than using generic language such as "response papers," "term papers"? (Such writing might include not only scholarly writing in your field but also other genres intended for specialists, non-specialists or lay audiences.) Does your proposal describe how you will help students understand the conventions and expectations associated with the kind(s) of writing you ask them to do?

Visibility
Students are more likely to take their writing assignments more seriously if their papers are taken seriously as part of the class—either as work-in-progress that could benefit from peer feedback before being revised or as texts that might add useful ideas, insights or interpretations to class discussions. Are students reading and discussing each others papers (either finished products or drafts) during the course?

Want some guidance before you submit your proposal?

If you are unsure whether your course will meet all of the guidelines, or if you would like help thinking about how to design or revise a course so that it will, contact Cary Moskovitz, Director of Writing in the Disciplines, at cmosk@duke.edu

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[1] The most useful feedback on student writing is "transfer-oriented"— focused remarks that help students understand what they should continue to do (because they're doing those things well) and what they should do differently in future writing assignments—and why. For tips on giving effective feedback, see http://uwp.duke.edu/wid/responding.htm.

[A&S Committee on Courses, 2009]