

University Writing Across the Curriculum Committee

What Is “Writing Intensive” at ECU?

Courses that have been designated “writing intensive” are those which go beyond merely *assigning* a writing project or series of writing projects to test students’ knowledge of course content. Rather, a WI course provides students with opportunities to learn how to write in the genres, styles, and voices appropriate to the discipline of the course.

While any number of courses in a degree program/major/minor may require students to write in various ways – e.g., short, writing-to-learn activities; formal or informal reading responses; annotated bibliographies; essay exams – the WAC Committee reserves the title “Writing Intensive” for those courses which clearly demonstrate that students are working toward the following university Writing Outcomes:

Students will

1. Use writing to investigate complex, relevant topics and address significant questions through engagement with and effective use of credible sources;
2. Produce writing that reflects an awareness of context, purpose, and audience;
3. Demonstrate that they understand writing as a process that can be made more effective through drafting and revision;
4. Proofread and edit their own writing, avoiding grammatical and mechanical errors;
5. Assess and explain the major choices that they make in their writing.

In order for a course to be considered “Writing Intensive,” faculty must demonstrate that the course engages students in all of these writing outcomes.

Research on learning transfer makes the compelling case that reflective-analytical/metacognitive activities increase the likelihood that students will be able to transfer knowledge and skills from one activity, project, or course to another. As such, the WAC Committee expects all WI courses to provide space for students to analyze/reflect on the choices they make as writers. The University Writing Program provides several examples of reflective writing assignments that faculty can use/adapt in their courses [INSERT WEBSITE]. The UWP staff are also happy to meet and provide feedback on your ideas as you prepare your WI course proposal.

The WI course designation further requires that, at or near the end of the term, students submit samples of their writing to their University Writing Portfolios (housed in iWebfolio) for WAC program assessment purposes. Ideas for implementing this requirement, as well as instructions for uploading materials to iwebfolio will be provided on the writing@ecu website (www.ecu.edu/writing). UWP staff will gladly meet with you to discuss strategies for incorporating this assessment component into your course.

Preparing Your WI Course Proposal

As you work on your course proposal for WI consideration, keep in mind that the members of the WAC Committee represent very different disciplines from across campus, and as such the committee holds no singular assumption about the “right” way to design a WI course. The committee is interested in seeing how your course, as you articulate it below, provides students a scaffold for reaching ECU’s Writing Outcomes. As there is no one way for course projects/activities to meet these outcomes, it is likely that faculty will use a variety of writing activities in order to achieve the goals of a WI course. Your proposal should enable committee members outside your discipline to understand the types/genres of writing you plan to assign and how those types/genres are intended to help students reach the university Writing Outcomes. Additionally, your proposal should make clear how you plan to integrate the requirement that students submit writing samples for program assessment.

On its website (www.ecu.edu/writing), the University Writing Program provides several examples of course proposals for you to use as you create your proposal. UWP staff are available to meet with you and provide feedback as you prepare your WI course proposal.

What Documents Should I Send the WAC Committee for Review?

Sample Course Syllabus

A sample syllabus should be included with the proposal. The sample syllabus, as well as future syllabi for the course should the WI designation be approved, must include the following WI statement:

Writing Intensive (WI)

_____ is a writing intensive course in the Writing Across the Curriculum Program at East Carolina University. This course will focus on the development of writing skills. Upon completion of the course students will:

1. Use writing to investigate complex, relevant topics and address significant questions through engagement with and effective use of credible sources.
2. Produce writing that reflects an awareness of context, purpose, and audience, particularly within the written genres (Including genres that integrate writing with visuals, audio or other multimodal components) of their major disciplines and/or career fields.
3. Demonstrate that they understand writing as a process that can be made more effective through drafting revision.
4. Proofread and edit their own writing, avoiding grammatical and mechanical errors.
5. Assess and explain the major choices that they make in their writing.

This course contributes to the twelve-hour WI requirement for students at ECU. Additional information is available at the following site: <http://www.ecu.edu/writing/wac/>.

What Happens at the WAC Committee Discussion of My Course Proposal?

Once your proposal has been distributed to the WAC Committee, you will receive a notice that your packet has been assigned a time on the agenda of a future meeting of the WAC Committee. When possible, faculty are encouraged to attend this meeting to discuss the proposal with the committee. The committee uses that time to better understand what writing looks like in the discipline that is proposing the course and how this course helps students to be more effective writers in that discipline. The committee may ask for revisions to the course proposal based on that conversation. Typically, the committee votes either to a) accept the proposal as is, b) to accept the proposal pending minor revisions that can be submitted to the chair of the committee and do not require full committee review a second time, or c) to return the proposal to the department for significant revision. Courses that require significant revision will come back to the WAC Committee at the next meeting for reconsideration.

How Are WI Courses Assessed?

Grading student work is always the responsibility of the course instructor. Neither the WAC Committee nor the University Writing Program has any interest in second-guessing or questioning the way that faculty evaluate the work of their students.

However, in order to ensure quality of the WAC program at ECU, the WAC Committee, in conjunction with the University Writing Program, has established several methods for assessing the effectiveness and the integrity of the program.

1. Each semester, faculty teaching WI courses are asked to send a copy of their syllabus (and a description of their writing assignments if those are not already detailed in the syllabus) to the University Writing Program. The UWP uses these documents to garner a yearly snapshot of how writing is being taught across campus and reports to the WAC Committee on its findings.
2. Each semester, faculty teaching WI courses instruct students to upload writing samples to their University Writing Portfolios. Each year, compensated, trained assessors use a rubric based on the university Writing Outcomes to score randomly selected university writing portfolio samples. The results of these direct assessments of student writing inform the development of instructional support for WI course faculty and supplemental writing support for students in WI courses.
3. Based on an established rotation, available on the UWP website, departments/programs are asked every five years to review their WI course offerings and to provide a packet of materials to the WAC Committee demonstrating (or in order to demonstrate) that WI course syllabi have consistently included the Writing Outcomes and that writing assignments and teaching practices have worked to help students meet those outcomes. Extensive directions on how to prepare those assessment packets are available on the UWP website.
4. Upon review by the WAC Committee, if courses have not been taught as “writing intensive” and have not sought to meet the ECU Writing Outcomes, the relevant department chair will be notified that the WAC Committee may vote to remove the WI designation from the course at a future meeting.

Is There Anywhere I Can Go for Help with Creating the Writing Components of My Course?

Absolutely. The staff of University Writing Program welcomes faculty at any time and is happy to work individually with faculty on proposals or on effective methods for integrating writing into a course. They can also help departments think about what courses are best suited for WI designation.