Writing ACROSS the CURRICULUM @ Paul Quinn College

Robert Tinajero, Ph.D.
Kaley McGill, M.A.
In writing across the curriculum (WAC) programs, students build their writing skills in every course, throughout their college experience. Writing instruction is considered the responsibility of all faculty members, not just those who teach English or Composition.

Writing in the disciplines (WID) refers to teaching students to adopt appropriate writing conventions for the particular field in which they are writing. For instance, a biology instructor would teach students how the style of a scientific report differs from that of a literary analysis, business plan, or historical essay.

Writing about writing (WAW) focuses on having students critically evaluate the ways in which writing, language, and communication affect human lives and a variety of social issues and situations.
BASIC PRINCIPLES OF WAC PROGRAMS

* Writing promotes learning and is an effective instructional tool in any discipline.

* Every instructor is responsible for building students’ writing skills.

* Writing should be integrated into every course in some form.

* Basic writing skills should be taught to students in a consistent format across all departments.

* Instructors should teach students to recognize and adapt to the writing conventions that are unique to their particular field of study.

* Writing instruction should be continuous during all four years of undergraduate education.
We must simultaneously teach students, throughout their entire academic experience, general academic writing skills that are transferable throughout their curriculum (WAC) and to differentiate between the writing conventions that make writing in each discipline unique (WID). This is not only the job of composition instructors but the job of all faculty members in all disciplines.

-Robert Tinajero

The “Across” in “Writing Across the Curriculum” does not merely signify that the doing of writing and the teaching of writing are going on everywhere in the university, in every department—although that’s part of it. The further implication is that writing instruction should be linked and coordinated across the campus.

-Jonathan Hall in “Toward a Unified Writing Curriculum”

In a unified writing curriculum, every instructor at every level—from “basic writing” developmental courses to freshman composition to senior seminars that function as capstone writing courses in a particular discipline—would have a clear idea of the writing competencies and outcomes that should be set as a goal for the course. The result, for the student, should be a more seamless sequence of writing instruction, not merely a collection of random courses in which some writing is assigned.

-Jonathan Hall in “Toward a Unified Writing Curriculum”
The Importance of WAC Programs

“Professionals use writing every day for a variety of purposes:
• to communicate information
• to clarify thinking
• to learn new concepts and information

Students need practice to be able to use writing effectively to meet these same goals. One or two writing classes don’t provide enough daily practice.

Like all language skills, writing skills atrophy when they aren't used. Yet students often report that they do no writing at all during a semester because they don't even take notes during some classes. For students who take only multiple-choice exams, writing can be avoided almost completely for months at a time. Assigned writing in all courses helps students keep their writing skills sharp.

Moreover, faculty in all disciplines have discovered that assigning writing in their classes helps students learn material and improve their thinking about ideas in the courses. Writing assigned across the curriculum also helps students prepare for the day-in and day-out communicative tasks they'll face on the job, no matter what the job is.

So why assign writing in all classes? Students will learn more and will leave college better prepared to face communication challenges if they write consistently over the course of a four-year college program.”

At Paul Quinn College, all instructors should:

Assign writing as part of their courses: this may include short-answer essays, short papers, long papers, reports, and other documents.

Show students good examples of what it is they have been assigned to write; this includes discussions about proper format and organization.

Demonstrate to students how to conduct strong research in that particular discipline/field and how to properly cite sources (usually in MLA or APA).

Use the rubric labeled The Five Elements of Good Academic Writing when grading student writing (it is at the instructor’s discretion to choose what weight each element will receive for each writing assignment).

Point out to students how writing in their discipline may differ from writing in other disciplines in regard to formatting, organization, research, citation, tone, word choice, vocabulary, etc.
The FIVE ELEMENTS of GOOD ACADEMIC WRITING

Across all courses at Paul Quinn College, students’ writing is evaluated according to a rubric based on these five criteria. The consistent use of this rubric will help students to build basic writing skills across all genres of writing and all disciplines of study.

1. **Format**
   Students must follow the professor’s instructions for the header, font, margins, and spacing.

2. **Information**
   Students’ writing should reflect an understanding of relevant content and demonstrate strong critical thinking.

3. **Organization**
   Students should create an outline or plan before they write and structure their writing in a meaningful way.

4. **Research**
   Students should use only credible sources and cite them according to a style such as MLA or APA.

5. **Grammar**
   Students should proofread their writing for grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
Composition Courses

The learning outcomes of Composition I and II are carefully aligned to help students build a solid foundation of basic writing skills that apply across all genres and disciplines. Furthermore, Composition I and II use the same textbook, which ensures the coherence and consistency of writing instruction in these two fundamental courses.

Composition I

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will learn how to:
* understand essay instructions and develop a plan/outline for an essay
* conduct college-level research
* develop an argumentative essay/paper
* write a professional e-mail

Students will develop an understanding of:
* MLA citation
* the Five Elements of Strong College Writing
* how academic writing and "popular" writing differ
* appropriate grammatical and stylistic conventions for college-level writing
* the organizational differences between writing a short-answer essay, a short paper, and a longer paper

Beyond the SLOs, students should produce the following writing during the semester:
* An online blog/journal
* At least six short-answer essays
* At least one argumentative research paper
* Other assignments such as quizzes, exams, projects, presentations, etc.
Composition II
STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will review basic writing skills from Composition I.

Students will develop an understanding of the differences between MLA, APA, and CSE citation styles.

Students will analyze, discuss, and write about topics and issues relevant to the field of rhetoric and writing studies which may include but are not limited to

* Rhetoric and Technology
* Rhetoric and Politics
* Rhetoric and Gender
* Rhetoric and Race/Racism
* Rhetoric and Relationships
* Rhetoric and Healthcare/Science
* Rhetoric and Religion

Beyond the SLOs, students should produce the following writing during the semester:

* An online blog/journal that is a continuation of student’s blog from Comp I
* At least six short-answer essays
* At least one research paper about a topic relevant to rhetoric and writing studies
* Other assignments such as quizzes, exams, projects, presentations, etc.
A key component of the WAC program at Paul Quinn College is the Writing Hub, where students can receive one-on-one writing assistance. Writers of all skills levels may seek help at any stage in the process, from brainstorming ideas to revising and editing a final draft. Although students are encouraged to schedule a 45 minute appointment with a tutor, “walk-ins” are also seen on a first-come, first-served basis.

Most students come to the Writing Hub for tutoring, but they are also free to use the computers in the facility during business hours. Additionally, the Writing Hub offers students access to a variety of writing resources, including Grammarly, an online grammar checker that not only finds errors, but teaches users how to fix them.

**WRITING HUB SERVICES**

* Brainstorming
* Creating outlines
* Organization
* Thesis statements
* Grammar
* Research
* MLA/APA/CSE/Chicago citation

* Essays
* Annotated bibliographies
* Presentations
* Scholarship applications
* Resumes
* Cover letters
* Creative writing
FURTHER READING

For more information about Writing Across the Curriculum, we recommend these readings:

“Moving Beyond Academic Discourse” by Christian Weisser

Teaching Naked by Jose Antonio Bowen

The Well-Crafted Argument: Across the Curriculum by White and Billings

“Writing is Not Just a Basic Skill” by Mark Richardson

SOURCES


