

Organizational Response to a University Writing Initiative: Writing in the Disciplines (WID) in an Interdisciplinary Department

Cathleen O. Erwin

Auburn University

Tina M. Zappile

The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey

The authors use an institutional theory framework to examine the impact of a newly adopted university-wide Writing in the Disciplines (WID) initiative in courses offered by three undergraduate programs housed in an interdisciplinary department at a major land-grant university in the southeastern United States. They identify and describe three types of institutional pressure on departments and individual faculty members to adopt changes in writing: normative, mimetic, and coercive. A systematic review of 97 discipline-specific course syllabi from Fall 2009-Spring 2012 was conducted to determine whether there were significant changes in the quantity and types of writing assignments in courses before and after the development and submission of a department writing plan as required by the newly implemented university writing initiative. The results show significant positive changes in the following measures of relevance of writing in discipline-specific courses: the weight of writing assignments as a proportion of final course grades, the level of sophistication of the intended audience identified in writing assignments, and the level of course engagement with writing as evidenced by the inclusion of course objectives specific to writing outcomes. They attribute these changes to specific aspects of the writing initiative as well as the influence of accrediting organizations and the University that fit within each of the three categories of institutional pressure identified in the paper.

DOI: [10.37514/DBH-J.2013.1.1.03](https://doi.org/10.37514/DBH-J.2013.1.1.03)