

Expansions and Explanations of the Writing-Intensive Core Requirements

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The Faculty Core Committee has adopted four requirements for courses to count as Writing Intensive. We did this after reviewing requirements at some 40 other universities and in consideration of the circumstances at DU, which include the trajectory from the first-year seminars and the first-year writing program. WI Courses are taught in sections capped at 15 students, to support faculty efforts. The requirements are listed as single numbered sentences. I've fleshed them out a little, in paragraphs that follow each.

- 1. Students will write a minimum of 20 pages (about 6000 words), some of which may be informal, but a majority of which must be revised, polished, and intended for an educated readership.**

Different kinds of writing serve different kinds of purposes. For example, “writing to learn” assignments are designed primarily to have students grapple with course concepts in order to engage them more fully. They might consist of reading summaries or responses, course journals, or answers to specific questions. They might even be assigned in class, during the first ten minutes to help students focus on the topic of the day or during the last ten minutes, to formulate some ideas about the preceding hour. These and other informal writing assignments might be relatively short, single draft assignments, receiving brief comments and graded holistically.

More formal writing assignments put a premium not on the student as learner but on the student as communicator of ideas to various audiences. The stakes are higher in this kind of writing—everything counts—so students tend to have longer to produce these assignments, which almost always require multiple drafts. Given the extra time and significance of these writings, faculty generally respond more fully to them and occasionally comment on a draft before the final version is due.

The faculty development in writing seminars for ASEM courses will provide numerous options for assignment making. However, here are some scenarios:

- At the beginning of every class meeting, Professor Whitt has students turn in a one-page response in which they comment on what they found most interesting, puzzling, or disturbing about the readings for that class meeting. She writes a brief reaction on each of them and assigns a rating from one to three. Professor Whitt also assigns two five-page papers, one in week 5, the other in week 10.
- Professor Becker has his students keep a media log, in which each week they summarize and analyze at least two television episodes, YouTube videos, or films related to his course content. Students post their logs on the class Blackboard, and every two weeks, they write a comment on someone else's posting. Becker has a final 10-page paper due at the end of the course. Students turn in a draft in week 8.
- Professor Kvistad wants to focus on more extended, formal writings in her course. Accordingly, she assigns three seven-page papers, due in week 4, 7, and 10.

2. Students will complete a minimum of three writing projects that are distributed over the quarter; exceptions might include a cumulative project completed in multiple stages.

It's more effective—both to develop writing abilities and to learn course content—for students to write frequently rather than infrequently, even if doing so means that papers will be shorter. Generally, then, students should write at least three papers in the course. The faculty development seminars for the ASEM courses will provide strategies for making effective assignments. Keep in mind that the pattern of assignments can take many forms. For example,

- Professor Jefferson assigns ten 2-page papers, one due each week. She requires students to revise 4 of these papers.
- Professor King begins the course by having a one-page paper due each class meeting for the first 10 classes. She then has a five-page paper due in week 7 and a second five-page paper due in week 10.
- Professor Jones assigns three 6-7 page papers, spaced over the course of the semester.

In a few cases, professors may find it vital to have fewer than three papers, perhaps because they find it important to produce a single, larger writing project. Such projects can—and should—be divided into several smaller projects that culminate in the final whole. Doing so, and providing feedback to each piece, accomplishes many of the goals of a longer project.

- Professor Klaus wants students to complete a 20-page, researched position paper on a topic central to the course. In week 2, assigns a one-page proposal. In week four, he assigns a 2-page paper that summarizes and analyzes two key readings on the topic. In week five, he assigns an annotated bibliography of all the sources to be used in the paper. In week seven he assigns a first draft of the entire paper. In week ten, he assigns the completed final draft.

3. Students will be required to revise at least some of their work based on feedback from their professor.

One of the most powerful strategies for teaching writing is to provide feedback to students on a draft, then have them revise the work before turning it in for a grade. “Providing feedback” is not editing or correcting. Instead, the professor indicates strengths and areas of improvement for the student, who must then do the real work of revision (literally, “seeing again”). Feedback can come as written responses to drafts or in the form of individual conferences. Students in writing intensive core courses should have the opportunity to revise multiple papers after feedback from the professor.

Except in the rare cases when students have turned in a highly polished draft that is the product of extensive revisions already, most revising feedback focuses on “higher level” matters than mere grammar, punctuation, or style. The faculty development seminars for the ASEM courses will provide some strategies for encouraging effective revisions.

Some examples of revision comments are:

- Your draft is too one-sided to be effective. That is, while you present the arguments for X pretty well, a lot of reasonable people would argue for Y instead. Can you take into account their arguments and still defend your position?
- Your draft relies extensively on quotation and summary. While these are generally apt, the paper doesn't have enough of your own thinking. For example, when you summarize X, what do you see as its significance or importance?

- Your assertion X lacks sufficient evidence to be convincing. What facts or analysis could you provide to make your point?
- I have a difficult time following your line of thinking. For example, on page 2 you jump between point A and point B, and the connection just doesn't make sense. You'll probably need to write more obvious connections, but you might also have to rearrange the parts of the paper—or even discard some.

4. **There will be some instructional time given to writing.**

Giving “some instructional time” to writing certainly doesn't require providing extended lectures. (In fact, that would be less effective than other strategies.) One of the purposes of the ASEM faculty development in writing seminars is to provide some minimal strategies that nonetheless can be very useful to students.

Consider several possible teaching practices

- Whenever Professor Wallace gives a writing assignment, she takes 10-15 minutes of class time to talk about the assignment. She asks students to brainstorm ideas, she contributes some ideas of her own, and she discusses evaluation criteria for the papers, perhaps sharing a grading rubric.
- For each assignment, Professor Kalter has students bring a draft to one class. He divides into small groups and has them furnish some peer response to one another, following a review sheet he has provided.
- After each assignment, Professor Mencia selects two or three of the strongest papers and reproduces them for the entire class, then takes several minutes of class time to point out their strengths.
- Professor Jones discusses her writing process on an article she's writing, including sharing drafts with the students. Occasionally, she invites a colleague or advanced student to do the same.
- Three or four times a quarter, Professor Roen invites professional staff from the Writing Center to guest teach in the class, for about 45-minutes each time. These topics range from helping students generate ideas to helping them revise to helping them document sources effectively.

Once a week, Professor Anukye leads a 15-minute discussion about a piece of writing from her field. She invites the students to “read like writers,” that is, to point out the features of a text and to speculate how its writer got from blank screen to finished product