Guidelines for Writing-Intensive (WI) Courses

“Writing represents a unique mode of learning, not merely valuable, not merely special, but unique [...]. Writing serves learning because writing as process-and-product possesses a cluster of attributes that correspond uniquely to certain powerful learning strategies” (Janet Emig, “Writing as a Mode of Learning”).

1. Students’ writing skills will diminish if not reinforced and practiced between First-Year composition and graduation.
2. Students’ writing improves if they write while they’re engaged in a subject area.

Writing can subvert the lecture/test/lecture pattern of education in a positive way by promoting an active engagement with the subject matter by the students. Students can take more than one WI course, but should take a WI course in their second or third year. The purpose of the Writing Intensive class is to help foster a culture of consistent writing for all disciplines and give students an iterative writing experience throughout all four years of their college career.

WI courses focus on two fundamental goals: (1) writing to learn, and (2) writing to communicate. A WI course is not a course that primarily reinforces fundamental writing skills; it must also encourage students to think more clearly and express their thoughts accurately through critical thinking enhanced by writing. This is a two-pronged approach where students learn to think more clearly about a discipline, and students improve their writing through feedback from the professor.

WI courses are an opportunity for faculty to introduce students to the discourse conventions of a discipline, and for them to find out what it means to become a member of that discipline’s intellectual community. This requires a mix of low-risk and high-risk assignments, some that are graded, some that are not graded, and some that are written in more than one draft before a grade is assigned. A course can use physical portfolios, electronic portfolios, journals, lab reports, business plans, or the conventional academic essay, depending on the discipline. (See the Marist Writing Center Website for materials on how these assignments can be crafted and how to respond to student writing). The main point is that this course is more than just adding a term paper to an existing course.

Workshops will be conducted that will discuss pedagogy, encourage teachers to introduce collaborative work, explain how to create directed lessons on research techniques, discuss generating checklists for feedback on drafts, and clarify minimal-marking strategies.

General Guidelines for all WI Classes

1. WI classes should be kept as small as possible.
2. There should be a minimum of 5,000 words (20 pages) of writing that is graded for content and style. This may include some combination of formal and informal writing, in-class and out-of-class writing, drafts, and journals, though the discipline that offers the class may specify the number of formal papers required. Also included in such writing can be blogs, wikis,
or online forums. Essay exams will not count as a paper, but can count for up to five pages of graded writing.

3. At least one paper should go through a complete revision process. The instructor should show the student the process of revision, or work with the Writing Center to help him or her understand how to revisit the material in order to have a better understanding of the process; this is not simply a correction of errors found in the first drafts. Revised pages are not added to the total page count. For example, a revised ten-page paper counts as only ten pages of writing.

4. The writing in this class should count for at least 50% of the grade.

5. Writing should be spread throughout the course in a sequence of related assignments rather than concentrated in a large term paper. The number of papers or types of assignments depends entirely on the content and discipline of the course. Papers can engage students in particular tasks, e.g., summary, analysis, integration of sources. An instructor could generate assignments that discuss ethical issues of the discipline, or expose students to a disciplinary problem to be solved, or to a question on which experts in the field disagree.

6. WI instructors are all strongly encouraged to make use of the tutoring services in the Writing Center, and to consult with the Center when necessary regarding writing assignments.