

The Writing-Enriched Curriculum at Moravian

The Writing-Enriched Curriculum at Moravian College (WEC) is a research initiative that focuses on fostering connections between the development of discipline-relevant writing abilities and the mastery of discipline-specific student learning outcomes. Through WEC-generated reports, academic units are able to create Writing Plans, documents that situate writing characteristics and abilities, and outline how writing will be thoughtfully integrated into the unit's curriculum and later assessed. WEC at Moravian is led by Dr. Crystal N. Fodrey, Director of Writing and Chris Hassay '17, a graduate student researcher. This research process is optimized for our Small Liberal Arts College (SLAC) context and works towards providing detailed information that will assist academic units in developing well informed writing plans.

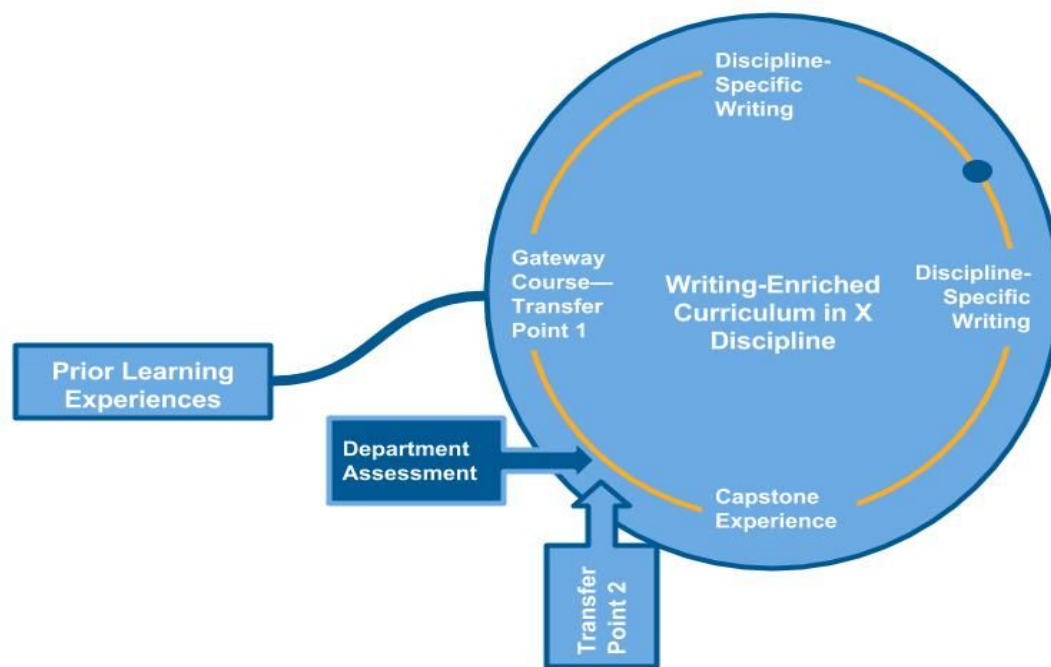
Our goal at the undergraduate level is to situate WEC within one unified activity system that has the overall objective of producing liberal arts graduates with mastery demonstrated in at least one content area and improved writing abilities/rhetorical knowledge. The mediational means of this proposed activity system—undergirded by the conceptual framework of rhetorical-genre theory—are as follows: 1) a first-year writing experience (FYWS) taught by faculty across the disciplines in which teaching for transfer via threshold concept "key terms" is emphasized through reflective practices captured in digital portfolios; 2) transfer pursued at key points (e.g., gateway and capstone courses) and tracked through portfolios capturing genre-specific discourse and student reflection on/in disciplinary curricula developed using Writing-Enriched Curriculum research and reflective processes; 3) faculty trained on how to recognize, improve, and assess these essential communication components within disciplinary contexts. For graduate programs, we envision WEC as a tool for both curricular assessment and student growth. In these specialized contexts where students are developing skills at a focused level, WEC can help foster cohesion and more intentionally identify writing's role in the graduate experience.

Inspired by WEC at the University of Minnesota, our program utilizes quantitative and qualitative investigative methods to situate writing within different departmental contexts, leading faculty to make curricular changes that more thoughtfully utilize writing practice throughout a student's course trajectory. WEC is built upon the idea of department-retained agency; as such our work is informed not only by current research in the field but also the internal ethos of those departmental faculty engaged in the process. This goal is realized through the creation of a Writing Plan.

What is a Writing Plan?

Writing Plans characterize writing in a discipline, name the writing abilities with which department faculty would like students to become proficient, map those abilities to the SLOs for a major, map those writing-enriched student learning outcomes to courses in the major, and plan for relevant writing assessment and instructional support. Assisted by the Director of Writing and WAM committee, members of that department would then be responsible to implement and assess that program.

The WEC process is designed to ensure that each Writing Plan is faculty driven, reflects relevant definitions of writing and course structures, and further, that faculty in WEC departments have regular opportunities to assess and revise their plan. All Writing Plans are designed to address a set sequence of basic questions: How can writing in this academic unit be characterized? What writing abilities should students in this academic unit be able to demonstrate upon graduation? How can writing instruction be most effectively sequenced into the unit's curricula so that graduating students are able to demonstrate desired writing abilities? What assessment strategies would the faculty like to see in place? What sorts of support do faculty need in order to achieve the optimal integration of relevant writing instruction? As might be imagined, answers to these standard questions, and the discourse styles used to answer them, vary from academic unit to academic unit. Plans approved by the Writing at Moravian Advisory Committee will be posted to our public website, which is under development.



Reasons to Opt-in to WEC

1. Your department recognizes the importance of graduating agile communicators and may be dissatisfied with current approaches to writing instruction and/or writing abilities demonstrated by students enrolled in your program.
2. Your department could use more customized, discipline-specific support in achieving more optimal integration of relevant writing instruction into the curricula.
3. Your department wants formative assessment data related to writing outcomes but faculty members do not have time or are not sure how to collect this information themselves. Assessment data/support supplied to all WEC departments includes:
 - a. Comprehensive survey data regarding characteristics of relevant writing and assessment of student writing abilities and the instruction they receive. This data is gathered from students in the major, faculty and instructional staff, and, when possible, professional affiliates.
 - b. Basic curricular mapping that provides faculty members and instructors from across the department/major's curriculum with descriptive information about the kinds of writing and writing instruction that are taking place in all courses, thus allowing for collaborative sequencing.
 - c. Support for longitudinal assessment of student writing, in which capstone-level writing is assessed against criteria generated locally, by the department's faculty.
4. Your department supports the model of change forwarded by the WEC, namely: independent, faculty driven, and elective.
5. Your department's curriculum is already writing-enriched, and you would like it to be formally designated and promoted as such.