Motion for Recognizing and Implementing Upper-Level, Writing-Intensive Courses at Colby

Vision and Background
As the second stage of implementation of the Colby Writing Program, we move to define and to implement upper-level, writing-intensive experiences across the curriculum and through the majors. Writing-intensive courses or experiences at the intermediate level would be designated W2 and those at the advanced level W3. The goal of this designation is to signal to students the courses that integrate discipline-specific content with writing pedagogy, process, and products appropriate to the major field(s) of study.

At a high level, our vision for writing at the intermediate and advanced levels is a developmentally structured approach offered through the majors and available to students across Colby’s curriculum. Students’ writing-intensive instruction currently begins with first-year W1 courses that introduce college-level writing and research expectations. These courses take a Writing Across the Curriculum approach and emphasize writing as a process of critical thinking, research, and revision with readings and inquiry shaped by a theme of the instructor’s choice. As students come to the next stage of their Colby careers at the end of their second or third semester, they join department and program communities. We are proposing that students would then move on to intermediate- and advanced-level writing-intensive experiences in their major fields of study. Locating upper-level writing classes in the disciplines makes sense for Colby. This approach builds on faculty’s experience as writers in their fields; authentically integrates writing instruction and disciplinary knowledge (rather than artificially isolating writing as a separate “skill”); and supports departments’ ownership of the goals, forms, and purposes for writing in their fields.

Motion: Writing-intensive courses in the disciplines will receive Colby catalog and transcript designations as W2 or W3 following the Common Understandings (see pg. 2). Faculty will offer such courses primarily, but not necessarily exclusively, to provide writing-intensive experiences for their majors.

Definitions: W2 experiences use writing to build disciplinary knowledge and introduce students to the types of writing, research, and critical thinking characteristic of their major field of study. W2 courses include some writing instruction, revision, and individualized feedback, building a bridge from students’ first-year writing experiences to more advanced work in the majors. W3 experiences use writing to explore advanced content and require students to develop more sustained, substantive writing projects as defined by departments in ways appropriate to the field(s). The W2 and W3 Common Understandings (see pg. 2) articulate these definitions as guidelines with some additional detail, following the examples of the Common Understandings created for W1 courses.

Process: Faculty members desiring such designation(s) for their course(s) will submit a course proposal (for new courses) or brief explanation of how the course is writing-intensive and addresses the Common Understandings (for existing courses) plus relevant supporting materials to Academic Affairs Committee (AAC). AAC will approve W2 and W3 designations, consulting with the writing committee on the writing-related components of such proposals as appropriate.
Guidelines for Upper-Level, Writing-Intensive Courses

W2 Common Understandings

Upper-level, writing-intensive courses teach, not just assign, writing and research practices appropriate to a particular discipline or field of study. W2 courses build on the W1 student learning outcomes and common understandings. For pedagogical reasons, we recommend that courses be capped at 18 students (or an approved equivalent such as weekly, small writing-oriented course meetings) to allow for individualized feedback and revision.

In addition, W2 courses will:

1. Introduce students to field-specific stylistic, research, and format conventions.

2. Use some class time for writing instruction.

3. Scaffold writing across the semester and/or within significant assignments. In other words, students will work on writing projects in stages—e.g., proposals, sections, research source lists, drafts, or outlines—guided by faculty feedback.

4. Give students some practice in constructing arguments, supported by reasoning and evidence, appropriate to the field(s) of study.

5. Have students substantively revise their writing for at least one assignment based on feedback from faculty and/or peers.

6. Give students practice in finding, evaluating, and integrating research for at least one writing assignment. (Departments/programs should adapt this understanding to fit their research expectations for their students.)

7. Substantially weight writing assignments in students' final course grades. Total word count and pages required will vary by discipline.

8. Articulate some writing-related goals on the course syllabus and provide evaluation guidelines for major assignments.

9. Introduce students to delivery and presentation formats appropriate to the discipline.

W3 Common Understandings

As culminating experiences in the majors, W3 writing-intensive experiences build on the goals and common understandings for W1 and W2 courses. W3 courses increase students' understanding of the purposes, forms, and conventions of communication in a field and provide practice in advanced writing. For pedagogical reasons, it is recommended that W3 courses be capped at 18 students. Departments and programs may also choose to structure W3s as in-depth independent projects, group projects, or performance/art pieces accompanied by a substantial written component.

Respectfully submitted,
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