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(s) 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.
NOTE: Based on faculty feedback, the Writing Across the Curriculum Advisory Committee revised the Common Understandings for W2 and W3 to better represent a) the key pedagogical principles and b) the intentional flexibility of these guidelines so that departments and programs may implement and apply them in ways most appropriate to the discipline(s) or field(s).

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, the recommended course cap is 18 students.

At a minimum, W2 courses will:

1. Introduce students to the stylistic, research, argument, and genre conventions of the discipline(s)/field(s). Total word count or pages required will vary by discipline/field.
2. Use some class time for writing instruction.
3. Provide some “scaffolding” to give students practice with essential steps in the writing process. (e.g., drafts, annotated bibliographies, pre-writing, topic proposals, outlines, brainstorming, methods, or discussion sections.)
4. Have students practice revision and learn to incorporate faculty feedback on their writing.
5. Include writing-related goals on the syllabus and provide guidelines for major assignments.

W3 Common Understandings

W3 courses increase students’ understanding of the purposes, forms, and conventions of communication in a field of study. W3 writing-intensive experiences provide practice in advanced writing and research and build on the goals and understandings for W1 and, normally, W2 courses. Some departments and programs may structure W3s as in-depth independent projects, group projects, or performance/art pieces accompanied by a substantial written component. For pedagogical reasons, the recommended course cap is 18 students.

Respectfully submitted,

Writing Across the Curriculum Advisory Committee: Martha Arterberry, Michael Burke, Bob Gastaldo, Paul Greenwood, Paula Harrington, Laura Saltz, Katherine Stubbs, and Stacey Sheriff.