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General Education Writing Subcommittee Report
March 11, 2009

Members: Linda Lohn, Laura Purdy, Cindy Speaker, Tom Stiadle, and Susan Wansor

The subcommittee met six times this semester to discuss writing in light of the College's mission, institutional goals, and academic program goals as charged by the Educational Policy Committee. Members of the subcommittee agree that clear precise writing is an essential skill for students to learn. One cannot be liberally educated without it. Members also agree that Wells needs to be explicit in its expectations regarding writing, have a curriculum appropriate for the students it admits to develop this skill, and be committed to providing the support resources necessary to facilitate student success with it. We would suggest revision of the current academic program goal that states students will be enabled to "communicate reasoned points of view to inform and persuade a variety of audiences" to indicate writing specifically.

Below find a draft of possible learning goals and objectives related to writing and means of achieving them. Beginning assumptions included acknowledging:

- the level of students' writing performance upon entrance to Wells and the experiences with writing they bring with them. We need to teach the students we have.
- the variability that exists between students' writing skills upon entrance to Wells. We should be able to develop a personalized plan to help students work on their writing.
- the existence of a student culture that may be less academically motivated. We cannot assume that students will pursue development as writers without providing them reasons to do so.
- the relationship between language and thought. We want to avoid the false dichotomy of writing well versus thinking well.
- the expectations of employers and graduate schools that college graduates are competent in written communication. We should be able to document their competence.
- practicing writing is critical to becoming a proficient writer. We want students to engage in writing across their entire time at Wells.

Goals

Students will become proficient in college-level writing as they experience writing throughout their undergraduate experience and will demonstrate improvement in writing both at the technical (stylistic) and content (conceptual) levels.

Learning Objectives

Students will :

- Demonstrate competence in Standard Written English with proper use of grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
- Think critically by evaluating information, developing ideas, organizing complex arguments, and addressing counterarguments.
- Develop voice and recognize that different forms of writing are appropriate for different purposes and contexts.

- Apply the writing process that includes prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing.

Means

Curricular Requirements:

- First-Year Seminar (WLLS 101) – The writing goal aspect of the course is that students will improve their writing. Specific related learning objectives include that students will: understand writing as a process; refine their facility with Standard Written English; develop skills to construct and carry out an argument and practice writing for various purposes (including exams, charged papers, papers involving outside sources, and essays or papers with free response and free source conditions).
- Writing Attentive* Courses– These courses would include significant writing requirements in terms of frequency and amount of writing and facility with Standard Written English but more importantly they would directly address writing as a process requiring substantial feedback and revision. Courses exist currently, and others could be modified, to meet criteria for designation as a writing attentive course. The subcommittee recognizes that for such courses to be successful, class size would have to be limited. Determination of a limit should be made by the Educational Policy Committee.

Criteria to include:

Total number of words written (e.g., 15-20 pages of informal and formal writing)
 Progression of writing assignments with sequencing based on course learning objectives
 Progression of writing assignments from reflection to critical analysis
 Required significant revision of a specific number of pages
 Substantial feedback (which includes instructor feedback and peer review)
 Writing for specific audiences
 Grades on written work to be a majority of the final grade
 Writing instruction as part of class time

Number required: 2 with one in the sophomore year and one in the junior year.

*The term attentive borrowed from Bates College. "Writing Attentive" courses rather than "Writing Intensive" as writing intensive is often thought of as having a focus on the amount written rather than the process of writing itself.

- Writing in the Major – Each major would articulate the kinds of writing skills expected of their students and indicate how students learn these skills and demonstrate their competency. It is expected that for many majors the Senior Capstone project will be a critical component in assessing student performance.
- Writing Portfolio – Demonstrating improvement in writing across the undergraduate experience can only be done if writing is documented at different stages. Specific guidelines for the portfolio would need to be developed indicating not only what should be included but also when portfolios would be evaluated and by whom. The subcommittee believes that students should be required to include material yearly and that it may make the most sense for major fields to be responsible for evaluating the portfolios.

Supplemental Support Mechanisms:

- Elective courses in writing instruction including those in “Nuts & Bolts of Writing” (composition) and Elements of Writing (writer’s workshop)
- A more fully staffed Writing Center including in addition to peer tutors opportunities for workshops, modularized instruction, and available material resources (including software, reference guides)
- Faculty development supporting the teaching of writing

From EPC March 25, 2009 Meeting Minutes:

Writing Proposal

- good learning objectives

- ~grammar and punctuation tend to be glossed over; not the case here

- ~point brought up stating that standard forms of punctuation, citation, etc...are not always taught, even when covered in class, due to a professor's personal style or background

- mentions a dichotomy of writing well vs. thinking well (i.e. content vs. quality of writing); discussed the meaning of this and whether it was relevant. Decided that, yes, there can be a dichotomy and it should be addressed.

- suggestion to take the word "less" out of bullet three, found under the assumptions made while drafting the proposal

- use of the term "writing attentive" was well received

- ~need enough faculty to be able to teach these courses, but perhaps many existing courses would qualify for this category

- ~requiring students to take one of these courses in sophomore, and one in junior year may place a strain on students, schedule wise

- ~these courses could be found in any major, but the question of whether or not it would create a system wherein certain majors would be under more strain due to such a requirement (i.e. MPS or BCS majors, whose required courses are less likely to be "writing attentive" was posed? Writing attentive requirement could then be met while completing other gen. ed requirements (such as through a sociology or history course)

- ~concern about whether this causes a problem with students in study abroad programs

- ~concern about how this will affect transfer students

- ~discussed the possibility of starting with only one writing attentive class at first, then moving to two if it works well

- the criteria for the Wells 101 course was brought up (and a rubric later sent out through email)

Writing portfolio

- practical concerns (grading, usefulness, etc)

- discussed what the portfolio would accomplish, or is intended to accomplish

-question of who would judge it was brought up

-concern about whether or not different majors would deal with them differently was also posed

March 6, 2009

Report of the EPC Subcommittee on Formal Reasoning

[Members: Professors Collmer, Frazier, Lossowski, Vawter, A. Shilepsky (Chair)]

Subcommittee Charge

The charge for the Formal Reasoning Subcommittee is to discuss formal reasoning in light of the College's mission, institutional goals, and academic program goals. If we determine that the general education curriculum should include requirements related to formal reasoning, we are to draft a proposal that includes the following components:

- (1) specific learning objectives (with accompanying rationales)
- (2) examples of learning outcomes
- (3) means or methods for how students will fulfill requirements
- (4) ideas for assessment

[The Mission statement, institutional goals, and academic program goals are in the Appendix below.]

The Subcommittee examined the relationship between formal reasoning and the College's mission, institutional goals, and academic program goals and determined that that a student's ability to reason formally is key to meeting the stated goals in all three areas. For example, the Mission Statement says Wells educates "students to think critically, reason wisely ...", which requires formal reasoning abilities. Moreover, logic and critical thinking courses support the goal in our Mission Statement of preparing students to "appreciate complexity and difference" and even "to embrace new ways of knowing"---as rational argumentation and critical analysis of arguments often represent and cultivate 'new' ways of knowing for our students.

With respect to our Institutional Goals, formal reasoning helps develop "students' ... analytical and critical capabilities" (goal #3) and "sound judgment" and "the knowledge and skills for thoughtful decision-making" (goal #5). Formal reasoning courses also promote goal #1 of providing an educational experience that "supports students as unique individuals." There is a crucial relationship between the development of critical thinking and the development of an individual's capacity for independent and autonomous thought.

In regard to the academic program goals, formal reasoning promotes the goals of helping students to "evaluate information" (2nd bullet point), "communicate reasoned points of view

to inform and persuade" (3rd bullet), and the last goal of developing "thorough knowledge of basic principles", since formal and informal logical analysis is a method of inquiry (or contains several such methods).

This subcommittee considered carefully whether the requirements for graduation should be changed to specifically include training in the areas of both formal logic and quantitative analysis. We discussed how quantitative skills contribute to students' "analytical and critical capabilities" (goal 3 of the Institutional Goals), and whether the development of such capabilities should be specifically stated in our proposed Learning Objectives. Because we feel that graduates who lack basic quantitative skills are less likely to be able to "think critically and reason wisely" (Wells' Mission Statement), we have included specific statements about such skills in our proposed Learning Objectives. At the same time, it would be ideal to be able to require that all students take a formal reasoning course such as PHIL 114: Logic and Critical Thinking, as courses in math or computer science do not teach the same type of formal reasoning skills. However, because we realize that college resources at the present time are not adequate to support a curriculum that requires all students take courses in the areas of BOTH formal reasoning and quantitative analysis, we have not proposed a change in the current requirement in this area (that is, one course in either logic, mathematics, or computer sciences). However, we would like to add a second requirement specifying an applied course in formal reasoning. For the moment, we are relying on the college Distribution Requirements to meet this new requirement, because most Wells students will get additional training in the use, manipulation, and analysis of quantitative data as well as additional practice in critical analysis.

Therefore, our proposed Learning Objectives, which are modeled on those of Ohio University, are the following (including objectives in the areas of both critical reasoning and quantitative analysis, as well as in the area of technology).

Learning Objectives:

1. Reason clearly to construct, support and evaluate arguments and draw valid inferences.
2. Correctly understand and interpret quantitative statements and data.
3. Promote independence of thought by developing competence in understanding, articulating and critically assessing multiple points of view.
4. Develop sufficient computational skill to manipulate mathematical and graphical information useful in their discipline.
5. Express quantitative and logical ideas clearly and accurately.
6. Be competent in the use of appropriate technology in the learning process.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Demonstrate competence in the development of critical arguments and inferences in an academic discipline and everyday life.
2. Interpret the output of a quantitative operation in an academic discipline
3. Demonstrate an ability to express and evaluate multiple and competing perspectives in a careful, rigorous, and fair way.
4. Interpret quantitative data described in print and electronic media, including newspapers, magazines, television, and the internet.
5. Correctly use appropriate technology

Proposed Formal Reasoning Requirement

Two Courses as follows:

- 1. One course (3 semester hours minimum) in formal reasoning, which includes: any Wells College course in mathematics, excluding internships, PHIL 114 Logic and Critical Thinking, a Wells College computer science course at the 131-level or above, excluding internships, or exemption through examination. [This is the current requirement.]*
- 2. An Applied formal reasoning course. At the moment, we are satisfied with the General Distribution requirements for meeting this requirement. (For example, most laboratory sciences courses meet this requirement and will satisfy both this requirement and the laboratory science requirement. Other courses could be designated as meeting this requirement if needed later.)*

Ideas for Assessment

The Subcommittee discussed but does not recommend the use of examinations to determine if individual students meet the formal reasoning requirement. We recommend that EPC consult regularly with teachers of formal reasoning courses to determine if the formal reasoning goals and objectives are being met.

Appendix

Wells College Mission Statement

The mission of Wells College is to educate students to think critically, reason wisely, and act humanely as they cultivate meaningful lives. Through Wells' academic program, residential atmosphere, and community activities, students learn and practice the ideals of the liberal arts. The Wells experience prepares students to appreciate complexity and difference, to embrace new ways of knowing, to be creative, and to respond ethically to the interdependent worlds to which they belong. Committed to excellence in all areas of its reach, Wells College equips students for lifelong learning and for sharing the privileges of education with others.

The Five Institutional Goals of Wells College

To support her mission, Wells College will:

1. Provide an educational experience that supports students as unique individuals engaged in the study and practice of the liberal arts.
2. Maintain an excellent faculty that is skilled in teaching, dedicated to rigorous intellectual development, and actively committed to pursuing new knowledge and learning strategies.
3. Develop students' intellectual curiosity, analytical and critical capabilities, and aesthetic awareness and creativity.
4. Provide a rich community environment that fosters awareness and sensitivity to social diversity and encourages responsible action in an interdependent world.
5. Develop self-confident individuals who exercise sound judgment and have the knowledge and skills for thoughtful decision-making.

Academic Program Goals

A Wells College education enables students to:

- examine enduring and contemporary questions that shape human understanding
- use the scholarly and creative traditions of the liberal arts and contemporary technologies to locate and evaluate information
- communicate reasoned points of view to inform and persuade a variety of audiences
- incorporate an understanding of diversity in their academic work and as members of a learning community
- develop an appreciation of languages and cultures in a global context
- acquire knowledge based on scholarship and research about women
- engage in collaborative practices in the classroom, in campus life, and in the community at large
- develop thorough knowledge of basic principles, methods of inquiry, and current issues in an academic field of study

From EPC April 8, 2009 Meeting Minutes:

3. Continuation of the review of reports from the general education subcommittees

The Committee started with discussion of the report from the subcommittee on formal reasoning. The chair of the subcommittee in opening remarks indicated that the committee was trying to be practical, working with what we do now including the distribution requirements, in developing its proposal. If the subcommittee had been working with the ideal, the group would have brought forward a proposal that required students to do both a logic and critical thinking course (or its equivalent) and a mathematics course (or its equivalent).

Issues and questions raised during discussion included:

- What exactly is meant by formal reasoning? Does number 1 of the learning objectives capture the essence of what we mean by formal reasoning?
- Why is lab science the focus of the applied formal reasoning course?
- The idea of putting the philosophy option in the applied category.
- How do the learning objectives and the requirements go together? Objectives specifically mention quantitative competence and use of technology.
- Concern of how small majors would roster courses that would fulfill requirements.
- The recommendation from the subcommittee reaffirms the status quo.
- How do we know the current requirements are succeeding?
- Could majors be involved in making critical judgments about whether or not their students are satisfying learning objectives? Can major fields develop these skills? Could ask major fields how they would or do develop students' applied formal reasoning abilities.
- The need to be intentional.
- Is critical thinking the same as applied formal reasoning?
- Testing students for math placement.
- Faculty concern that increasing formal reasoning requirements as part of general education would take away from the ability to meet the needs of majors. Example used was if philosophy was required to offer more logic courses it would reduce their ability to offer ethics which is critical for some majors. Should ethics be a requirement for general education?
- Remediation not seen as something attractive.
- Proposal under discussion relies on the distribution requirements continuing.
- If the current requirements continue, there's a need to rationalize them better.
- Student concern that upper-level course offerings in the major are not as available as needed in order to graduate in four years. But some members of the Middle States visiting team found that the number of special topics and upper-level courses in the majors were greater than necessary given our size and curriculum.
- Concern that the curriculum feels under-theorized; especially of concern for students thinking of graduate school.

- Rather than using the term general education which has the connotation for some that it's something you do early in the college years and "get out of the way," idea of using "ongoing education". The importance of thinking of learning objectives for all graduates and what might be covered in the major.
- It would be difficult to present where we are on this requirement.
- Given the learning objectives – they really lead to three courses; concern given the number of credits required for certain majors; how do majors fulfill these learning objectives.
- Use of "appropriate technology" in the learning objectives allows differences depending on majors. Perhaps could use "appropriate quantitative reasoning," "appropriate formal reasoning."
- Students don't necessarily separate their courses into gen ed, major, and courses they want to take.
- Formal reasoning requirement could be met by specific courses in gen ed and applied formal reasoning met through the major.
- Standard 12 of Middle States specifically mentions quantitative skills as part of general education.

Recap of the major issues: (1) a combined requirement – formal reasoning and quantitative skills; (2) practical considerations; (3) what might be at the expense of implementing certain requirements; (4) assumption of other requirements.

From EPC April 15, 2009 Meeting Minutes:

4. For the rest of the meeting, members continued the discussion of the role of formal reasoning in general education at Wells. Comments and areas of discussion follow:

- Quantitative Reasoning (QR) and Critical Analysis and Reasoning (CAR). These areas are mentioned in Middle States Standard 12. They parallel the course choices student take to satisfy our current formal reasoning requirement (Math/CS or Logic). However, "QR-Attentive" and "CAR-Attentive" courses could be selected or developed to meet objectives in these areas.
- Colleges have a variety of ways to satisfy formal reasoning and other requirements. Hobart and William Smith College and Wagner College, for examples, have widely different ways of meeting general education objectives. A student at HWS fills out a petition to describe how she will satisfy the quantitative reasoning requirement and only her adviser must approve it. At Wagner, all students take a significant number of specified courses in the first two years to meet general education requirements.
- Sandy Shilepsky looked at 16 colleges in the Middle States region and found 14 had a QR requirement. Many required students pass an exam or take a QR class. The two colleges that did not have a specific QR requirement required students to take at least two courses in natural sciences or mathematics.

- Wells used to do a QR section in an earlier version of Wlls 101.
- Many faculty members at an open meeting were supportive of a QR objective.
- Is there a level of mathematics that all students should reach by graduation? Do we know the QR skill level of our incoming students? SAT's, ACT's and work in high school math classes are indications, but we do not have mathematics admissions requirements and we do not test students in mathematics or QR.
- Should we require QR or CAR, or both of them?
- Why did Sandy remove the old objective 3 "Promote independence of thought by developing competence in understanding, articulating and critically assessing multiple points of view" as one of the objectives? Answer: Because it was not addressed by the proposed requirement.
- Does the old objective 6 "Be competent in the use of appropriate technology in the learning process" belong in the formal reasoning area of general education? How do we assess competence in this and other areas?
- What about Informational Literacy? The librarians may be able to assist in this area. This area includes much more than what is done in Wlls 111.
- The formal reasoning requirement could depend on a student's background. The advisor and student could decide on how to satisfy the objectives/requirement. This might be difficult to implement.
- How much should we invest in general education as opposed to majors and advanced work?
- Students should be able to understand and make formal arguments.
- We should not forget ethics when designing our general education program.
- General education should be more than just a process of checking off a list of courses.

At the end of the discussion, members voted on a question raised earlier. Should students be required to satisfy requirements in either **quantitative reasoning** or **critical analysis and reasoning**, or in both? The group voted 7-0 in favor of both.

Current Working Proposal:

Critical analysis and reasoning is the application of higher order analytic and creative cognitive processes to arrive at reasoned and supportable conclusions, to synthesize and apply knowledge within and across courses and disciplines. [Modified from Montgomery College]

Learning Objectives:

1. Reason clearly to construct, support and evaluate arguments and draw valid inferences.
2. Promote independence of thought by developing competence in understanding, articulating and critically assessing multiple points of view.
3. Apply critical analysis and reasoning skills in developing solutions to real-world problems.
4. Express logical ideas clearly and accurately.

Quantitative reasoning is the application of mathematical concepts and skills to solve real-world problems. In order to perform effectively as professionals and citizens, students must become competent in reading and using quantitative data, in understanding quantitative evidence and in applying basic quantitative skills to the solution of real-life problems. [From Hollins University]

Learning Objectives:

1. Correctly understand and interpret quantitative statements and data.
2. Develop sufficient computational skill to manipulate mathematical and graphical information useful in problem solving.
3. Express quantitative ideas clearly and accurately.

Possible ways to meet Quantitative Reasoning (QR) and Critical Analysis and Reasoning (CAR) objectives:

1. A **Petition** (similar to Hobart and William Smith College's). Should only the advisory approve it? Some or all petitions could be reviewed by another individual or group.
2. **Prior course work or test scores.** For examples, getting a B or better in an AP statistics or calculus course, scoring a 3 or higher on an AP math or statistics tests, or scoring over 600 on the Math achievement test. This might not work well for CAR.
3. **Passing an exam** that we administer.
4. Taking a **QR attentive course** and a **CAR attentive course**. We might design a course that would satisfy both.
5. Allowing **major fields** to be responsible for its majors meeting some or all the QR and CAR objectives.
6. **QR Tutorials** similar to those at Hamilton College.

LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT: DRAFT OF PROPOSAL (Ernie Olson, Chair, subcommittee, EPC)

OVERVIEW OF LANGUAGE STUDY AT WELLS

1. Wells has moved away from classical languages
2. Wells has lost modern languages as well (for example, Russian) (German as a major)
3. Modern languages can be expanded in the future as needed (say, Chinese, in connection to any development of an Asian Studies program, major, or minor) (see national trends) (Arabic might be another example of a possible addition in the future if need/interest increased) (also compare with current Japanese courses at Wells)
4. Wells will continue its current offerings for the foreseeable future with some with possible expansion

THE SUB-COMMITTEE'S PROPOSAL = KEEP THE LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT AT WELLS

LANGUAGE SUBSTITUTIONS: The subcommittee had a lengthy, initial discussion of the longstanding practice of allowing a range of substitutions for fulfillment of the requirement. Over the years, many allowances/substitutions have been made for students for whom English is not a first or primary language. Examples of substitutions include Chinese, Onondagan, Greek, Latin, and American sign language.

The subcommittee **recommends** that these allowances **continue** to be an option for fulfilling the language requirement.

RATIONALE FOR KEEPING THE MODERN LANGUAGES REQUIREMENT

The subcommittee also had a lengthy discussion of reasons for keeping the language requirement (see page, 34 of catalog = 1. FOREIGN LANGUAGE: Two courses at the college level in a single foreign language).

As an integral part of a liberal arts education, the study of languages other than English ...

- develops analytical and critical capabilities, aesthetic awareness, and creativity
- fosters awareness of and sensitivity to social diversity
- stimulates intellectual curiosity
- promotes thoughtful decision-making
- creates greater knowledge about one's first language
- emphasizes the relationship between language and culture
- encourages responsible action in an interdependent world

- promotes a global perspective on world events and the challenges of our complex world
- promotes intercultural exchange and dialogue
- is useful for graduate study in many fields and can be an important added advantage in any number of careers
- is often required for admission to graduate school

Students of languages other than English...

- learn and practice the ideals of the liberal arts
- appreciate complexity and difference
- embrace new ways of knowing
- appreciate and respond ethically to the interdependent worlds to which they belong
- understand that the study of languages is part of life-long learning

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE WORDING OF THE REQUIREMENT (again, see page 34 of 2008-9 catalog:

FOREIGN LANGUAGE: Two courses at the college level in a single foreign language).

1. 'Foreign language' should be changed to 'in a single language other than English'
2. "two courses" should be changed to "6-8 semester hours" to make it clear that two 1-2 credit courses will NOT fulfill the requirement.
3. we feel the need for a clearer, more complete catalog explanation for why we have a language requirement.

Here's our "working text" for number 3:

Rationale: Though students will not attain fluency in any particular language from this experience alone, they will make progress toward our Institutional and Academic Goals, especially in developing curiosity and analytic skills, "an appreciation for languages and cultures in a global context," thoughtful and responsible decision-making (at Wells and beyond), all while enriching our community through awareness of diversity.

or

Placement through examination at the 200-level.

Rationale: Students who can demonstrate expertise at this level will have already developed the skills and approaches stated above and will be able, as unique individuals (have taken a less typical path), to transfer these things outside of a language classroom in order to enrich our community and introduce others to diversity in both academic and social settings, thus illustrating the positive outcomes of the practice of the liberal arts.

ASSESSMENT

The subcommittee has not had a chance to fully discuss assessment, though Professors Staples and N. Gill have provided a brief verbal outline of current assessment strategies in teaching languages other than English.