

Preliminary Summary of the UA Writing Emphasis Instructor Survey
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Summary

The Writing Emphasis (WE) survey found that WE courses are mostly taught by Tenure-Track professors who value the WE designation, but are somewhat unaware of its definition. A majority of WE courses contain over 25 students, have no TAs, and are graded solely by the instructor who require more than 15 pages of student writing (375 pages of writing/WE course/instructor). Nearly half of the WE instructors believe their students are not prepared for the kinds of writing required in their WE course, and they are concerned about second language writers. Less than half use the plagiarism detection device on D2L, our course management system. Summarizing, evaluating, synthesizing information was reported to be both most important and most difficult for students, as were issues of clarity (organization of paragraphs, and grammar/mechanics). More than half of instructors are interested in professional development opportunities that focus on managing the grading load, while just under half are interested in responding to student writing, and a third are interested in the design of writing assignments, and teaching with writing technologies. Only 1 in 5 instructors are interested in professional development opportunities about teaching writing to students whose primary language is not English.

The Survey Instrument

The request for survey participants was sent out to every individual professor from the UA Writing Program on February 4th and February 27th. We received approximately 45 responses on the first recruitment, and 27 responses on the second. We currently have a representative sample:

- 72 responses from 327 requests,
- a 22% response rate, within the 95% confidence interval.

Description of WE Courses

- 81% (n=58) are taught by TT professors. 6 % (n=4) are taught by graduate students.
- 82% (n=59) said the WE designation was important to extremely important in the design of their course.
- 43% (n=31) were unaware of the WE definition in the course catalogue.
- 63% (n=45) said the WE definition adequately characterized their class.
- 53% (n=38) of WE courses have >25 students. 47% (n=34) of WE courses have <26 students.
- 68% (n=49) of WE courses have no TAs.
- 74% (n=53) of WE courses are graded only by the instructor.
- 69% (n=49) of WE courses require more than 15 pages of student writing.
- Much more than 50% of the grade is most often tied to writing assignments in WE courses.



Summary of Survey Results

The Writing Practices in WE courses are highly diverse with an emphasis on analysis, report of findings, argumentation with appropriate evidence, and specific citation styles. Less common are narrations or descriptions of experience, description of methods, integration of numerical or statistical information, revision, and multimedia projects (all 40% or less).

A majority of instructors provide instructions, describe expectations, and explain the grading criteria. Less than half of instructors (40% or less) ask students to conduct peer review, write collaboratively, require multiple drafts, or assign brief writing assignments.

Just under half (46%) of WE instructors believe their students are not prepared for the writing requirements in their WE course.

About half (49%) of WE instructors are concerned about second language students.

No single citation style is the most common across the curriculum. Use of citation styles is highly diverse.

The three most important characteristics of student writing (from professors' perspectives) are: 1) Use of appropriate evidence to make an argument (61%); Summary, evaluation, and synthesis of information (56%); and Clarity (40%).

The three most pressing challenges to students (from professors' perspectives) are: 1) Summarizing/evaluating/synthesizing information (56%); Grammar and mechanics (47%); Logical organization of paragraphs (42%).

A significant majority of instructors post course materials (syllabi, assignment sheets, etc.) online. Just under half (43%) use the plagiarism detection device (turnitin) on D2L (UA's course management system), and assign at least one major written project using online technologies (41%). Only 13% of instructors use online or digital technologies to facilitate student-to-student peer review, and only 13% of instructors are not interested in using online or digital technologies. One in five (21%) are interested in learning more about using online or digital technologies.

The top five professional development opportunities that instructors are interested in are:

- Managing your grading load (54%, n=39);
- Responding to student writing (42%, n=30);
- Developing effective writing assignments (37%, n=27);
- Effectively integrating writing into your WE course (37%, n=27);
- Teaching writing with technology (32%, n=23).
- Teaching writing to students whose primary language is not English (18%, n=13)

