**WAC Committee Meeting Minutes**

**January 27, 2012**

**GCS 214B 12:00-2:00**

**(NEXT MEETING: Thursday, February 9th, 12:00-2:00 GS 214B)**

**Present**: Fred Bloetscher, Jeff Galin, Julia Mason, Daniel Murtaugh, Allen Smith, Julianne Curran

**Absent**: Rachel Luria, Ellen Ryan, Rosario Medina-Shepard, Joe Su

1. **Raising Class Caps in WAC courses**

* **Jeff Galin (JG)** introduced the issue of pressure to raise course caps and that the committee needs to decide how to approach it. The caps are at 27 students and 22 students for 2000+ level courses and 1000 level courses, respectively. Departments can submit waivers to raise these numbers. It is important to consider the effect a raise would have on faculty workload. For example, one additional student in a class can add up to six hours of additional work for an instructor in a semester beyond preparation time, instruction/office hour times, etc. Doing it properly, an ENC 1101-2 instructor spends about 12 hours a week per section. Adding 3 students per section adds an additional hour a week of work. For faculty on a regular 4/4 teaching schedule, four additional hours a week (64 hours in a semester) is substantial. The committee decided that it was not in favor of significantly raising course caps at either level and that 30 students per upper level writing course are too many. **JG** added that the committee should also maintain lower level writing courses to protect those teaching them as well as the course pedagogy. It is necessary to reinforce the importance of writing and support it throughout the levels of coursework. Students also must recognize that writing in their coursework is connected to their fields and that they will be held accountable for it as professionals. **Dan Murtaugh (DM)** also gave the reason that the course cap has been passed by the faculty senate, and to raise the caps the decision would have to go through the process again.
  + - * + **Allen Smith (AS)** questioned whether a required support such as use of the UCEW could be implemented since time constraints on faculty are a major concern, but **JG** noted that although that would be an ideal option, it is not feasible given the high volume of appointments and resulting limited availability of consultants. **AS** suggested another strategy of meeting with small groups of students with similar issues/concerns rather than with individuals to relieve faculty time constraints.
        + **Julia Mason (JM)** questioned the implications of losing WAC certification should caps be raised. **JG** explained that there are approximately 100 university courses that are WAC certified right now and that WAC certification corresponds with state qualification for Gordon Rule; therefore, some courses cannot lose WAC certification because they are state certified as Gordon Rule. **JM** asked and **JG** confirmed that a raise in caps could be mandated. **DM** raised concerns with the possibility of a mandate because beyond the quality of student writing, a mandate to raise caps would challenge the principle of faculty governance and therefore cannot be allowed. **JG** added that this is why such decisions must first go through a committee.
* **JG** added that in addition to cap concerns, the question has arisen university wide about the number of hours that faculty is in front of students. Concerns were raised regarding large WAC courses such as History and Philosophy needing to maintain three hours of class plus an additional breakout session. **DM** suggested WAC classes meeting for four hours a week, similar to the way foreign language classes meet. **Fred Bloetscher (FB)** noted that math classes have tried this approach with labs/discussions and pointed out the problem of raising the number of credit hours for a course. This may raise the number of hours required for a degree, which might discourage students from choosing a major. Similarly, having low hour requirements for a degree may leave students unprepared in the professional world without additional courses toward a MA or license.

**[Note: Arts and Letter decided to add a fourth hour to the History and Philosophy courses]**

* + - * + **DM** and **FB** noted the dilemma of trying to “grow” students in the university without significantly growing resources. There is a perception that Distance Education courses accomplish some of this goal, but flawed student perception of “instant communication” with faculty must be taken into account, as well as the difficulty of designing and teaching these courses.

1. **Transfer of ENC 3213/Writing for Management from English to Business**

* **JG** added that the cap matter raises concerns in case of ENC 3213/Writing for Management, which will be transferred starting Fall 2013. **DM** stated English is considering raising caps to 30 students for the course. **JG** said perception is that the class is less “onerous” to teach, but **JM** said that the work load is considerable and it can be a difficult course to teach. **[NOTE: English has decided not to raise caps above 27 students.]**

1. **Writing Enriched Curriculum (WEC)**

* **JG** introduced the idea of a parallel track to WAC for 2000+ courses called Writing Enriched Curriculum (WEC) that would not require WAC certification. The rationale is that departments incorporate more writing into their coursework and thus expose students to it as they move through the curriculum. This would not be considered for implementation until Fall 2013. **JG** proposed that such a program could be offered as a way to distribute support of writing throughout the university. The only way WAC would consider raising caps would be if this kind of curriculum program could support writing, especially in the case of transfer students who do not get writing experience according to WAC/writing standards at FAU. **JM** pointed out this kind of parallel program would not eliminate the burden on faculty, and **DM** would be hesitant to introduce WEC as a strategic support to a scenario of highly populated WAC courses that should not exist. **JG** explained there could not be a rough equivalency of “2 WEC courses equals 1 WAC course” due to the fact that WAC/Gordon Rule is state mandated.
* There is a possibility of working with the Accounting Department to initiate a kind of pilot program of WEC.

1. **Update from Honors College and transfer of Gordon Rule courses to WAC:**

* Following the next Faculty Senate meeting we (the Honors College) should have successfully converted all the courses we intend to convert with the possible exception of SYG 1933 which isn’t regularly taught. Once this is completed, the Honors College will have converted about 60 courses. I believe HC WAC courses will make up more than half of all WAC courses at FAU. The courses scheduled for approval at the next Faculty Senate meeting are AML 2010, AML 2022, ENL 2012, PHH 3400, PHI 1933, PHI 2642, and WST 3015.

1. **The new Assistant Director of WAC is Julianne Curran** ([jcurran3@fau.edu](mailto:jcurran3@fau.edu))

**[The committee collaborated on revising letter about the course cap issue to College Deans]**

**Letter regarding course caps**

RE: Reminder about course caps for WAC courses

FROM: Writing Across the Curriculum Committee

DATE: February 1, 2012

Both the 2011 FAU Faculty and Alumni Surveys rank the abilities to write clearly and logically and to critically evaluate information for decision making as two of the most desired skills of students at FAU. Business professionals tell us that writing is central to that success, and is the principle weakness of new college graduates. At FAU we have spent considerable time and effort helping students succeed in writing through the WAC program.

During these difficult financial times, it is no surprise that FAU is facing challenges that are resulting in increased class sizes. The WAC Committee is concerned that pressures on colleges and Chairs will lead to violations of the Faculty Senate mandates for caps in WAC courses of 22 students for ENC 1101 and 1102 (or 1102 equivalents) and 27 for all other WAC courses. Central to these mandates is the recognition that class size has considerable impact on students’ success as writers. While there is no magic number of students per class for effective learning of writing, it is nevertheless necessary to arrive at a number using our best analytical efforts and not to change that number without going through the same rigorous analysis and procedural steps that establish this number in the first place.

There are also dramatic time impacts on faculty who teach writing intensive courses with each additional student, which necessarily entails a dilution of time and support for each student. The Committee is particularly concerned about large course sections that typically use breakout sections for writing instruction. The Committee takes the position that if these sections are increased above current course caps or are not able to function in break-out sections, the courses will no longer meet requirements for WAC certification and will be decertified, which adversely affects students’ ability to fulfill a state mandate for graduation.

The Committee understands the complexity of decisions to increase course caps. Nonetheless, it is our charge to maintain standards for the WAC program on behalf of students across the university in order to ensure the quality and integrity of teaching writing at FAU. Therefore, the WAC Committee respectfully requests that all Chairs maintain the mandated course caps on WAC courses and that Chairs consult the WAC committee before changing course structures for these classes.

Keep in mind that departments may request an exception to the WAC guidelines for pedagogical reasons, but this procedure requires a formal request to the WAC Committee. Please contact Jeff Galin (jgalin@fau.edu) or Julianne Curran (jcurran3@fau.edu) to submit a request. The WAC Committee encourages any Chair or Dean who would like to discuss these issues to attend our upcoming WAC Committee meeting next Thursday, Feb. 9th from noon to 2:00.