

ADMINISTRATIVE MEMORANDUM
VPAA 08-04
January 12, 2009

HSU Policy on Improving Undergraduate Student Writing
Effective January 2009

Introduction

The Resolution on Approaches to Improve Undergraduate Student Writing (#04-08/09-EP), which was passed last semester by the Academic Senate and signed by the President, supported an inclusive approach to developing student writing skills throughout all academic programs. As noted in the rationale for the resolution, *“Anecdotal and assessment evidence suggests that many Humboldt State University Students need to strengthen their writing skills. In addition, writing proficiency is one of HSU’s student learning outcomes and one of the WASC themes. Because writing skill develops over time with constant practice, an approach that develops skills over multiple courses will increase student learning of this essential skill. In addition, developing discipline-specific writing skills is essential because effective writing is tied to the content of the writing.”*

As an initial, concrete step toward developing all students’ writing skills, this policy directs every undergraduate program to include discipline-specific writing skills as one of the Student Learning Outcomes for the major.

Implementation

The steps in implementing this policy specify a timeline for determining what kinds of documents the program will focus their students on learning how to write, describing what such documents are like, and identifying where in the program students will learn and practice the writing of those documents. Assessment requirements are also part of the implementation of this policy.

Timeline	Action Step	Additional Information; Resources
Friday, January 23, 2009	Department Chairs forward the names of two Writing Liaisons to Tasha Souza (tasha.souza@humboldt.edu).	Departments will begin the process of deciding which kinds of documents the program will focus their students on learning how to write. Resources: See attached template for program writing plan, along with examples of completed plans.
Early spring 2009	Departments add discipline-specific writing skills to each program’s list of learning outcomes.	
Saturday, February 21, 2009	Liaisons participate in the first of two half-day workshops, drafting plans to be further developed with their departments.	Liaisons will draft plans, to be developed and refined in collaboration with their departments Resource: Carol Holder, expert in the field of writing in the disciplines

This policy and implementation plan were approved by the HSU Academic Senate (11/04/08) and by President Richmond (12/11/08).

Timeline	Action Step	Additional Information; Resources
February-March, 2009	Departments discuss and develop their programs' writing plans.	<p>The resolution specifies that "by the end of the Spring 2009 semester, each undergraduate program (even those that already have writing as a student learning outcome) will complete the initial discussion/evaluation/curricular review of the role of writing in the major paying particular attention to characteristics that define good discipline-specific writing skills and the places in the curriculum where those skills are introduced, developed, and mastered."</p> <p>Resources: Faculty Development Coordinator/CAC Coordinator can provide assistance in writing plans and designing effective writing assignments (tasha.souza@humboldt.edu)</p> <p>Online resources are also available at http://www.humboldt.edu/~ugst/wac/index.html</p>
Saturday, April 4, 2009	Liaisons participate in the second of two half-day workshops.	<p>Liaisons will discuss and provide feedback on each others' program plans and work on developing effective assignments</p> <p>Resource: Carol Holder, expert in the field of writing in the disciplines</p>
April, 2009	Departments complete the revision of their program plans and work on developing effective writing assignments.	<p>Resources: Faculty Development Coordinator/CAC Coordinator can provide assistance in writing plans and designing effective writing assignments (tasha.souza@humboldt.edu)</p> <p>Online resources are also available at http://www.humboldt.edu/~ugst/wac/index.html</p>
May 8, 2009	Departments submit final version of program plans for developing student writing.	<p>Programs will be submitted to the designated committee via the Office of Academic Programs and Undergraduate Studies</p>
Beginning of Fall 2009 semester	Departments prepare for baseline assessment of their students' writing, to be completed by the end of the 2009-2010 academic year.	<p>Any major that has not already assessed a writing-oriented Student Learning Outcome must complete a baseline assessment of student writing by the end of the 2009-2010 academic year. The writing outcome will be inserted into the major's planned assessment schedule; in 2009-2010, the department may substitute assessment of the writing outcome for one outcome that was scheduled to be assessed that year.</p>

		<p>The departments may modify their assessment schedules to accommodate the added outcome. Departments that have already assessed this outcome for their students may choose to submit the results of that assessment rather than conduct a new one</p> <p>Resources: Faculty Development Coordinator/CAC Coordinator tasha.souza@humboldt.edu Faculty Associate for Assessment judith.little@humboldt.edu Online resources are also available at http://www.humboldt.edu/~ugst/wac/index.html</p>
October 15, 2009	Department receive feedback on program plans.	Designated committee will provide feedback and suggestions.
May 1, 2010	Departments submit baseline assessments of their students' writing.	Baseline assessment results will be submitted to the designated committee via the Office of Academic Programs and Undergraduate Studies

Additional Action

The resolution includes two additional steps to support development of student writing, both of which will require further action by the Academic Senate:

1. During the 2009-2010 academic year, the appropriate curriculum oversight committee will develop a draft policy on writing requirements for General Education courses. This policy will be submitted to the Academic Senate for approval by the end of the Spring 2010 semester.
2. A committee within the new Curriculum Review process, still under development and not yet approved by the Academic Senate, will be charged with oversight of progress in assessing and improving student writing.

Plan to Develop Discipline-Specific Writing Skills for Majors in _____

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Department Liaisons:

<i>(1.a) Identify a document type produced in the discipline, its purpose, and its readers</i>	<i>(2.a) List the central characteristics, as applicable, of the document type</i>	<i>(3.a) List the course(s)/typical assignments where writing the document is introduced, developed, mastered</i>										
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Plan to Develop Discipline-Specific Writing Skills for Majors in _____

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Department Liaisons:

<i>(1.b) Identify a document type produced in the discipline, its purpose, and its readers</i>	<i>(2.b) List the central characteristics, as applicable, of the document type</i>	<i>(3.b) List the course(s)/typical assignments where writing the document is introduced, developed, mastered</i>										
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Notes: Developing Students' Discipline-Specific Writing Skills

The attached template provides a framework for discussing departmental expectations for student writing and for reporting the results of those discussions.

Initially, it would be useful to collect and share samples of student work, to serve as a starting point for the discussion of expectations. When you're very familiar with documents within a discipline, it can be difficult to describe their characteristics. If that's the case, one helpful strategy is to look at examples of student writing that do not meet your expectations: describing what is missing in such work can provide a good beginning for articulating specific expectations.

- (1) **Identify a document type that is relevant for the discipline:** This could be a document that students would be expected to produce in their disciplinary profession after graduation (e.g., lesson plan, policy brief, peer-reviewed research article with abstract), or a more document aimed more at enhancing content learning and critical thinking (e.g., research paper, deliberative essay). It is likely that a number of document types occur within the program's curriculum; you're encouraged to identify the most important ones for students to master.

Purpose: What problem is the document usually intended to solve?

Readers: For whom is the document usually written?

- (2) **List the central characteristics, as applicable, of the document type:** Such descriptors as "well-organized," for example, can mean very different things in different disciplines.

Some characteristics you may want to consider in your description of **organization**:

Is the document divided into distinct **sections**, as in scientific research articles (introduction, methods, results, discussion, conclusion and recommendations)? If so, are they labeled with headings?

What is the **sequence of elements** -- how does the document begin? Is it organized chronologically? Do points precede or follow the evidence that supports them? What kinds of **transitions** are used? How does the document end?

Some characteristics you may want to consider in your description of **content**:

Attachment (1 of 2) to Policy on Improving Undergraduate Student Writing

Argument: Does the document focus on building an argument? If so, does it describe others' arguments before making one of its own?

Types of evidence/information: What kinds of information are used in the document?

Some characteristics you may want to consider in your description of **format and conventions:**

If the document uses published sources, what **citation format** is used (e.g., APA, MLA, CBE)?

Does the entire document consist of paragraphs, or are there graphs, lists, other elements?

Some characteristics you may want to consider in your description of **disciplinary context:**

What specialized **vocabulary** and terminology characterize the document?

Does the document reference **theories** in the discipline? If so, how are they named?

What kinds of **sources** does the content in the document come from?

- (3) **List the course(s)** in the curriculum where the processes involved in writing the document are introduced, developed, mastered; **identify representative assignments.**

Note that not all of the relevant assignments will be papers; other activities and exercises (lists, questions and responses, mindmaps) can contribute to the development of students' writing skills, especially in the early phases of producing a particular kind of writing.

You can repeat this process (and the form) for as many document types as your program wants to address in the curriculum.

First sample for program in “Egyptology”

Plan to Develop Discipline-Specific Writing Skills for Majors in Egyptology

Page 1 of 3

Department Liaisons: Dr. Jones, Dr. Brown

(1.a) Identify a document type produced in the discipline, its purpose, and its readers	(2.a) List the central characteristics, as applicable, of the document type		(3.a) List the course(s)/typical assignments where writing the document is introduced, developed, mastered
<p>Document type: Annotated Bibliography</p> <p>Purpose: To demonstrate thoughtful approach to published sources</p> <p>Reader(s): Instructor and peers</p>	Organization	Two sections: Intro, alphabetically-organized biblio w/ one-paragraph annotations	<p>Introduced: Course(s): EGPT 110 Typical assignment(s): Weekly 1-paragraph article summary.</p> <p>Developed: Course(s): EGPT 210, 350 Typical assignment(s): Short documented critiques (one and two sources, respectively) in APA format with Works Cited</p> <p>Mastery demonstrated: Course(s):EGPT 430 Typical assignment(s):Annotated Bibliography, at least 7 sources, completed in preparation for student’s capstone field research project in a later semester</p>
	Content:	Each entry summarizes source’s argument and describes what the source contributes to the writer’s own work on the topic	
	Format and conventions	APA Works Cited format, with each bibliographical entry followed by a single-spaced paragraph of about 150 words. Present tense.	
	Disciplinary context	Sources from refereed journals such as <i>Egyptology Review</i> and <i>Applied Egyptology</i> . Summaries typically reference major theorists (e.g., Hansen, Tut, Smith).	
	Other		

*Second sample for program in “Egyptology”***Plan to Develop Discipline-Specific Writing Skills for Majors in Egyptology**Page 2 of 3

Department Liaisons: Dr. Jones, Dr. Brown

<i>(1.b) Identify a document type produced in the discipline, its purpose, and its readers</i>	<i>(2.b) List the central characteristics, as applicable, of the document type</i>		<i>(3.b) List the course(s)/typical assignments where writing the document is introduced, developed, mastered</i>
<p>Document type: Hieroglyph analysis</p> <p>Purpose: To present and support original interpretation of hieroglyphs found in students' field research</p> <p>Reader(s): Instructor and peers</p>	Organization	Three sections with headings: Intro/literature review; Analysis; Conclusions/Recommendations for Future Research. Analysis section is inductively organized	<p>Introduced: Course(s):EGPT 110 Typical assignment(s): Hieroglyph description accompanied by sketch</p> <p>Developed: Course(s): EGPT 225, 380, 410 Typical assignment(s):Short hieroglyph research activity in EGPT 225; summary of major theory with supporting hieroglyph selection/description in EGPT 380; Hieroglyph Sketchbook w/descriptive captions in EGPT 410</p> <p>Mastery demonstrated: Course(s):EGPT 450 Typical assignment(s):Capstone Field Project research paper</p>
	Content:	Lit review provides methodological as well as theoretical background for writer's arguments; analysis section describes the graphemes before providing writer's interpretation; conclusion provides well-formed research questions for further investigation.	
	Format and conventions	General APA format with headings, but drawings of graphemes are included within the text rather than appended at the end. Writer's interpretations are modulated (e.g., the evidence “suggests” or “indicates” rather than “proves”).	
	Disciplinary context	Lit review references sources from refereed journals; writer's original interpretations reference published interpretations. Writer's argument is presented in context of at least one major theory (e.g., Hansen, Tut, Smith)	
	Other	Drawings of graphemes are camera-ready.	

Third sample for program in “Egyptology”

Plan to Develop Discipline-Specific Writing Skills for Majors in Egyptology

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Department Liaisons: Dr. Jones, Dr. Brown

<i>(1.c) Identify a document type produced in the discipline, its purpose, and its readers</i>	<i>(2.c) List the central characteristics, as applicable, of the document type</i>		<i>(3.c) List the course(s)/typical assignments where writing the document is introduced, developed, mastered</i>
<p>Document type: Memo of Understanding</p> <p>Purpose: To outline agreements regarding sites for field research</p> <p>Reader(s): Authorities vested with responsibility for important historical sites, as well as grant-awarding entities and university stakeholders (Director for Risk Management, Dean of Antiquities, Department Chair, International Programs Director, etc.).</p>	Organization	A brief list of basic assumptions is followed by separately-enumerated lists of responsibilities and other arrangements. Signature authorities are identified at the end of the document, and space for signatures provided.	<p>Introduced: Course(s): EGPT 411 Typical assignment(s): Reading/discussing sample MOUs; Research and Report on relevant stakeholders for a specific site (includes identification of key terms, tasks, and responsibilities for agreement)</p> <p>Developed: Course(s): EGPT 411 Typical assignment(s): Outline of stakeholder concerns regarding potential MOU, with possible wording to address each concern</p> <p>Mastery demonstrated: Course(s): EGPT 411 Typical assignment(s): Full MOU addressing all major areas of concern, to be reviewed by external panel of experts</p>
	Content:	Specific responsibilities for each party, mutual responsibilities, financial arrangements, the term of the MOU, and appropriate signatures	
	Format and conventions	“Whereas” introduces each of the introductory assumptions. The list of assumptions is followed by specific language chosen to introduce the “mutual promises herein contained” and the agreements to which the parties agree. Parties are clearly named; there is a great deal of redundancy for clarity’s sake.	
	Disciplinary context	Responsibilities include protection of antiquities and national sovereignty, observance of the Egyptology Ethics Protocol of 1917, and indemnification of the University from liability and excess costs.	
	Other	The needs of all stakeholders must be identified and addressed in the Memo of Understanding; these will vary from situation to situation.	