

## **Organizational Response to a University Writing Initiative: Writing in the Disciplines (WID) in an Interdisciplinary Department**

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Effective communication skills, both written and verbal, along with other “soft” skills, consistently top the list of surveys of employers regarding the skills they seek in new hires and the skills they often find lacking in new graduates (Selingo, 2012). In 2003, a national report was released indicating that content classes outside of English composition were providing a near-total neglect of writing (National Commission on Writing in American Schools and Colleges, 2003). Although the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and closely associated Writing in the Disciplines (WID) movements had been spreading across campuses in the U.S. since the 1970s (Russell, 2012), at the time of the report it does not appear that the incorporation of writing in specific disciplines or majors outside of the English department had taken off in the U.S., despite the success of WAC and WID programs on campuses across the country and well-attended WAC conferences. Their recommendations included a call for support not just from educators but also from federal and state policymakers to make resources available to support a real, fundamental reformulation of society’s view of learning through writing and communication and not just another educational fad imposed upon overworked educators.

In its report, the National Commission on Writing in American Schools and Colleges (2003, 3) recommended an aggressive agenda for putting more emphasis on writing across the curriculum, and underscored the connection between writing and critical thinking in stating that “writing is how students connect the dots in their knowledge.” An emphasis on critical thinking as a valuable student outcome has long been a focus of higher education, reflected in part by professional development opportunities and resources offered by organizations such as the Center for Critical Thinking, established in 1980. Hyland (2013, p. 53) argues that how we as academics and students understand our discipline(s), evaluate discourse, and effectively assert our own views is inextricably linked with our understanding of and ability to express through language in the written form, “as it is through language that academics and students conceptualise their subjects and argue their claims persuasively.” Furthermore, the WAC Clearinghouse journals regularly publish articles from faculty on the use of problem-based learning and other writing-intensive assignments to foster critical thinking. A recent interview with John Bean, author of the popular *Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*, reveals that his involvement in the WAC movement in part began with the unexpected popularity of his 1982 co-authored article on “Microtheme Strategies for Improving Cognitive Skills” (Rutz, 2003). Regardless of how closely the movement to improve (or restore) critical thinking as a cornerstone of undergraduate education has been traditionally connected to the WAC or WID movement, there is a clear connection today.

In a related movement, specific disciplinary fields have placed an emphasis on professional or vocational competencies that are considered to be essential for success for individuals working in these fields. This has been a common practice for many years among the professions that require licensure or certification in order to practice in the field, but has spread beyond to other disciplines that do not necessarily have a formal, required process for licensing or certifying individual practitioners. The development of recognized professional competencies has been driven from within the field through professional associations and industry leaders.

Consequently, educational accrediting bodies in specific disciplines have incorporated some or all of these professional competencies into the standards by which they assess educational program quality for program-level accreditation purposes, focusing on educational outcomes that indicate adequate preparation to enter the workforce with the skills, knowledge and abilities that meet the needs of the designated industry or vocation. Typically, these competencies include not only technical competencies specific to the discipline, but also include communication skills, both written and verbal, as key competencies and sometimes as one of the most important competencies for success in the workplace (see Epstein & Hundert, 2002; Hagerty & Stark, 1989; Maes, Weldy, & Icenogle, 1997; Rider & Keefer, 2006; Shewchuk, O'Connor, & Fine, 2005; Stefl, 2008).

In this study we explore how one interdisciplinary department was impacted by a WID program at a major land-grant university implemented in response to recognition of the need for improving students' abilities to perform complex literacy tasks and to write in various genres necessary for success in their future endeavors. Quantitative evidence to measure organizational change in the incorporation of writing at the academic program level was gathered from course syllabi in the time period 2009-2012. Using an institutional theory framework, we propose that the changes we observed from the results of our analysis can be attributed to three sources of environmental pressure: a) *normative* pressure through campus-wide marketing campaigns, student writing contests, faculty workshops, and other interventions implemented by the newly established Office of University Writing (OUW), b) *mimetic* pressure, through the process of departments observing models of writing behavior in other departments and mimicking those efforts, and c) *coercive* pressure through the University requiring academic departments to draft and submit a writing plan to the University Writing Committee, and/or writing being recognized as an explicit required outcome by outside discipline-specific accrediting bodies.

## **Background**

### **A New Writing Initiative**

In January 2008, a university-wide Writing Initiative Task Force was charged with developing recommendations for a comprehensive writing program. The initiation of the task force was partially in response to the increasing importance of writing and critical thinking skills for college graduates, the lack of these types of skills among college graduates nationwide, and feedback from students at the University regarding a relatively lower number of writing assignments compared to peers at typical universities with a similar Carnegie classification (Roberts & Boosinger, 2008). In August 2008, the task force submitted their full report findings that indicated that the existing freshman composition program provided a strong foundation in

writing, but the continued development of writing skills varied and relied heavily on individual faculty interest across the disciplines (Roberts & Boosinger, 2008). It was noted that programs with accrediting professional societies were more likely to have identified writing skills as a critical outcome of their program, however this outcome had not been embraced by the broader university community as a fundamental tenant of undergraduate education. In addition to changes to the existing freshman program and expansion of the Miller Writing Center, the task force recommended a WID outcomes-based approach with the design of student writing experiences left to individual faculty, or discipline experts.

The connection of writing to other skills or learning outcomes, including critical thinking, was also a key component of the original task force report. The expansion of the Miller Writing Center to students outside of English courses was recommended as a strategy to provide an “opportunity for face to face consultation in support of student writing in order to facilitate in-depth interactions that move beyond simple editing to support for critical thinking skill development.” (Roberts & Boosinger, 2008, p. 7). Furthermore, they specifically highlighted examples of writing as a vehicle for critical thinking as models of disciplinary-specific writing in departments across the university, including architecture and consumer affairs.

Recognizing that “an outcomes-based model for writing in the disciplines starts with the question, what writing competencies must students in a particular discipline master to be successful in the field?” (Roberts & Boosinger, 2008, p. 5), the task force based its recommendations on the premise that engaging faculty members in university writing is the best approach to improve student outcomes. The recommendations were formally endorsed by the University Senate and accepted by the University administration. The result was a university-wide initiative that included an explicit WID program for each undergraduate major, along with the establishment of new university senate committee (the University Writing Committee or UWC) and an Office of University Writing (OUW).

The OUW was formed and charged with working with the new UWC to develop the criteria and process for approving departmental writing plans and to periodically review implementation reports to make additional recommendations. The OUW was also tasked with providing workshops and support for teams of faculty who were engaged in the development of writing-specific outcomes for their departments, the implementation of the writing initiative at the departmental level, and assisting faculty in assessing writing. The OUW issued a formal call to each department to submit a writing plan to the UWC addressing specified criteria. Drafts of departmental plans were submitted for review and comments in Fall 2010. Given approval, departments were then able to implement identified changes in writing beginning with the Fall 2011 semester. The committee approval process, criterion for writing plans, a schedule for the three-year rotation of writing plan reviews, principles of writing for “writing in the majors” classes, and resources available to programs for creating new “writing in the major” classes were also made available through the OUW website, making the process transparent for faculty.

## Pressure on Departments to Improve and Increase Writing

A university-wide, discipline-specific writing initiative carries an explicit expectation of change at the faculty and departmental level within the institutional environment. Traditionally, departments or programs are the primary organizational units for disciplines in a university setting. Despite lines between disciplines sometimes being blurred with interdisciplinary centers and other innovations in higher education organizational units, this remains the case at most universities and colleges.

Institutional theory contends that the institutional environment strongly influences the development of formal structures in an organization, and that in the face of environmental pressures organizations will adopt practices that conform to the expectations of key stakeholders (Ashworth, Boyne & Delbridge, 2007; Corcoran & Shackman, 2007; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Shortell & Kaluzny, 2000). Environmental forces and/or actors may exert three types of pressures on an organization: 1) normative 2) mimetic, and 3) coercive. These pressures can be applied through normative standards that dictate how an organization should behave, through social recognition, and through regulation, such as state and federal laws (Ashworth et al., 2007; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995). Institutional theorists see these pressures as analytically distinct, but acknowledge that they are often hard to distinguish empirically (Ashworth et al., 2007; Mizruchi & Fein, 1999) and that the net effect of the pressures is an increase in homogeneity of organizational structures in an institutional environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

*Normative Pressure.* According to institutional theory, normative pressures arise from the influence of similar attitudes or approaches of professional groups and associations brought into a firm through hiring practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The introduction of a university-wide WAC or WID initiative has the potential to shift expected norms at the institutional level. If institutional norms shift, then it can be expected that department behavior will change to reflect the new set of norms in regards to writing on that campus. Normative changes in this case were spearheaded by the OUW headed by the newly hired Writing Programs Administrator. Among the changes were marketing campaigns to increase the awareness of writing on campus. The initial marketing campaign that utilized multiple strategies including posters in university buildings, banners on transit shuttles and an announcement and feature stories in various campus publications. The OUW also expanded the student writing center by establishing satellite locations around campus for students to access writing assistance, and communicated with faculty the availability and scope of the assistance. In 2010, a student-writing contest sponsored by the Office of University Writing was created to complement an existing University-wide common book program with several student winners coming from majors such as engineering, political science, and animal science.

Another key series of normative changes focused on identifying faculty members as stakeholders in the process of improving student writing. In addition to including faculty members in the original task force and newly established University senate committee, writing-specific faculty workshops were first introduced in 2010 new-faculty orientation sessions. The perception that the newly created OUW, often in conjunction with the campus' Biggio Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, intended to convey through their involvement in faculty

orientation was that there was professional development support for teaching, specifically in teaching writing.

Among the support made available was an opportunity for faculty to receive a stipend for participating in a year-long symposium on writing and teaching writing in 2010-2011 that included a series of workshops and submission of a writing assignment that either created or retooled incorporating elements discussed in the workshops (e.g., peer review, revision opportunities, etc.). The workshops also shared examples of effective writing assignments and sample rubrics, and emphasized a “writing to learn perspective” as a teaching tool to enhance discipline-specific writing (Herrington, 2012). The “writing to learn” perspective presented in workshops, as evidenced by the experience of the authors as attendees, also explicitly emphasized the connection of writing as a vehicle to improve other skills such as critical thinking. OUW also provided monetary support to several faculty members to enable them to present research and writing experiences from their courses at two conferences in the 2011-2012 time period. Several faculty members made presentations on semester- or yearlong projects or individual assignments that utilized discipline-specific writing to incorporate critical thinking, content mastery, or other student learning outcomes in a program or course, modeling the vision of the university-wide initiative.

Ongoing services provided through the OUW include a website populated with electronic resources on writing and teaching writing; focused presentations, workshops and facilitated discussions for groups of faculty; and individual faculty consultations. Students are provided peer tutoring through the newly expanded Miller Writing Center as well as electronic resources available through the OUW website. Additional services available for graduate students include workshops on various topics related to graduate-level writing. Underlying these efforts is an explicit message to combat what has been identified as common faculty responses to writing initiatives, that they are not expected to “become ‘writing teachers’” or sacrifice teaching content in the name of writing (Carter, 2012, p. 212). The writing task force was explicit in its vision to change the culture of the university to embrace writing. This list of normative pressures illustrates that the new writing office took its mandate seriously and was able to successfully partner with faculty members to spread normative pressure.

*Mimetic Pressure.* Mimetic pressure to copy successful structures or programs stems from uncertainty (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Mimetic pressure on faculty and departments to adopt changes in writing occurred primarily through the process of drafting the writing plan. The writing plan drafting process was made transparent for the inaugural group of departments and a key aspect was the availability of early plans to use as a template. While the OUW and UWC made clear that there was no *right* template and emphasized that faculty should address discipline-specific writing outcomes in their plans, the result of making early plans available was that similarly situated disciplines mimicked the changes in writing identified by the first group of writing plans. For example, the department in this study used initial drafts of plans submitted by closely related liberal arts departments to determine how it might structure changes in its own discipline(s). While the end result of the three writing plans drafted within this department was discipline-specific, mimicking changes identified by first-in-line departments was evident. The spirit of discipline-specific writing remained, as key changes were made in the subsequent editing process, however initial changes were made after other departments gave cues.

Mimetic pressure can also be observed in the spread of normative pressure across key groups of faculty members. Introducing writing as a key student outcome in first-year faculty orientation and professional development opportunities, for example, provided opportunities for faculty members to mimic attitudes and behavior of faculty who already adopted improvements in writing in their courses. In fact, anecdotal evidence from the experience of the faculty members completing this study suggests that key changes in writing in our courses were a result of opportunities to model, or mimic, better practices in writing from workshops offered by the OUW, illustrating a “showing, not telling” (Fulwiler, 2012, p. 6) approach to faculty development in writing instruction. Normative pressure to treat writing as an important and achievable student outcome was enhanced by opportunities to mimic other departments, and more importantly individual faculty members exhibiting best practices in writing in workshops or less formal settings.

*Coercive Pressure.* According to institutional theory, coercive pressure arises from legal mandates or the influence of organizations that an institution is dependent upon (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), and highlight the impact of political rather than technical influence on institutions (Ashworth et al., 2007). In this study, coercive pressure is viewed as stemming from two sources: the requirement of departments to submit a writing plan and the influence of discipline-specific accreditation standards related to writing.

A criticism of the top-down, university-wide WID or WAC approach that assumes a monolithic audience among faculty and staff is that it can be too coercive (Anson, 2012). However, it has also been noted that a top-down approach, particularly funding and support from administration, plays a pivotal role in program success (Miraglia & McLeod, 1997; Russell, 1987). As WAC and WID programs have spread and matured, experts assert that striking a balance between a bottom-up and top-down approach is important to ensure success and long-term program viability (McLeod, Miraglia, Soven, & Thaiss 2001; Mullin & Schorn, 2007). The approach taken at the University in this study could be considered a combination of top-down and bottom-up that was initially driven by concerned faculty but quickly moved to a top-down approach through the endorsement and financial support by administration for recommendations made by a broad representation of university faculty leaders (i.e., University Senate). Although the initiative was spearheaded and driven by representatives of the faculty, the communication of the requirement to submit a writing plan was distributed via the academic administration chain of command (Provost’s office to Dean’s office to department chair’s office to program directors to program faculty).

Our study assumes variance in the level of individual faculty knowledge of the genesis of the University Writing Initiative, and that some faculty might perceive the new initiative as an administrative mandate because of the method of communication and the requirement to submit a writing plan. Therefore, our use of the term “coercive” is meant to acknowledge and represent the pressure that could be experienced by department and program leadership as well as individual faculty who were concerned with losing the favor of higher levels of administration if the department or program failed to satisfactorily complete the required task within the allotted time frame. It is not meant to imply that a coercive process was utilized in the implementation of the writing initiative, but rather to represent the perception of the process by faculty who were

not closely associated or fully aware of the initiative. Our assumptions are based upon our personal involvement with and knowledge of the initiative, and with our observations of faculty colleague discourse about the inclusion of writing in academic courses and the writing plans.

Accreditation standards associated with writing also fall under the category of coercive pressure exerted on programs to comply with regulatory requirements in order to receive or maintain accreditation. In this department, two of the three undergraduate programs are accredited by discipline-specific agencies. The Association of University Programs in Health Administration (AUPHA) accredits the undergraduate health administration program. AUPHA requires that the program's curriculum must provide a course of study that ensures that students have competencies in communication (written and oral), computation skills (mathematics and quantification), critical thinking (ability to analyze problems), and societal and cultural context, in addition to specific knowledge and understanding of health care and healthcare management content (AUPHA, 2013). The program must have a process and method for assessing the accomplishment of student learning outcomes. In the re-certification process undertaken by the program immediately prior to the implementation of the university WID program, AUPHA recommended that the program incorporate more business writing assignments into its curriculum, particularly in the introductory courses. The National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) accredits the undergraduate public administration program. The program's accreditation process for NASPAA, specifically the process of self-evaluating writing as a key student outcome, also informed the program's writing plan as the accreditation standards in writing were clearly aligned with the new university requirement to enhance student writing.

To conclude, the new writing initiative influenced the institutional environment through a combination of normative, mimetic, and coercive pressures from its hybrid structure of top-down directives combined with strategic efforts to improve the culture of writing across the university, and faculty-driven changes to increase the emphasis on discipline-specific writing. Examples of similar department-embedded approaches to writing that intentionally combine these three types of pressure can be found at Miami University, Ohio, and the University of Minnesota. The Miami University College of Arts and Science (2013) adopted a similar writing initiative in 2010, requiring all programs to draft and submit discipline-specific writing plans that complemented their existing freshman composition program. The Howe Writing Center serves as their university's hub, supporting a culture of writing beyond the English department, and provides superficial evidence of a normative or cultural approach. The University of Minnesota's Writing-Enriched Curriculum (WEC 2013), established in 2007, also includes department writing plans in which faculty determine how writing will be incorporated and highlights research associated with the program. The degree to which they incorporated normative pressure in their initiative is unknown. We address the possibilities for future research assessing the effectiveness of these three types of pressures across campuses in the conclusion of this paper.

In summary, this research focuses on organizational change in an academic department precipitated by a university-wide WID initiative, and utilizes an institutional theory framework to suggest that the changes made by the academic programs were the result of three types of environmental pressures (normative, mimetic and coercive). Our research study examines the

types of changes made by three undergraduate programs from different disciplines housed in one department.

## **Design and Methods**

Our primary research question is whether there is evidence of a significant change in the inclusion of discipline-specific writing in undergraduate courses as a result of the implementation of this university-wide WID initiative. The primary hypothesis is that the pressures to conform to institutional norms within the university will lead to positive changes in writing inclusion in undergraduate programs following the implementation of the initiative. Quantitative evidence was gathered from course syllabi collected from the Department of Political Science in a large land-grant university located in the southeastern United States. The political science department houses three undergraduate programs: Political science (POLI), public administration (PUBA), and health services administration (HADM). This sample offers a unique opportunity to measure changes in writing across three distinct disciplines in a larger university setting with varied pressures to respond and adapt to a newly implemented call for increased and improved writing at the program level. Each discipline in this department faced different barriers and challenges in adopting new writing standards, thereby providing a built-in control for our study.

The university is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Two of the three undergraduate programs hold a discipline-specific accreditation: HADM is accredited by the Association of University Programs in Health Administration (AUPHA), and PUBA is accredited by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA). As noted in the previous section, both accrediting bodies address the incorporation of writing as part of their accreditation standards, therefore these requirements represent the presence and influence of coercive pressure on each of these two programs. POLI, however, has no outside accrediting body, therefore its work on the writing plan was largely a result of the new university initiative in addition to other motivations from individual faculty members.

Our sample includes 97 course syllabi collected prior to and immediately following the implementation of the writing initiative, which encompasses the time period of fall semester 2009 through spring semester 2012. We coded syllabi from every course identified in each of the three program's writing plans as including writing and counting toward the perceived requirements of the university-wide WID initiative. These courses either had existing writing assignments or were targeted to include newly created writing assignments designed to achieve improved student outcomes and reflect the types of writing identified as discipline-specific in the writing plans. The process of drafting and implementing new major-specific writing plans occurred during the 2010- 2011 academic year, therefore a conservative estimate of when changes could first be observed occurred at the beginning of the fall 2011 semester. Course syllabi from the fall 2009- spring 2011 time period are treated as the "before intervention" group while course syllabi for the fall 2011- spring 2012 time period are considered "after intervention."

In coding course syllabi for these two time periods, we focused on a range of variables that capture the quantity and level of sophistication of writing included in courses as identified by course syllabi. Table 1 provides a list of key variables that, together, measure the type and level of writing in courses as identified by the course syllabus. Appendix A provides a comprehensive list in table form of the variables captured in our original coding scheme.

Table 1

*Key Variables Measuring Writing in Course Syllabi*

Variable	Definition	Type	Measurement
Assessment	Grading weight in course	Continuous	0% - 100%
Audience	The type of audience for the writing assignment(s) identified in the course syllabus	Scale	1= Instructor only 2= Peers only 3= Instructor and Peers 4= Professional/external audience only 5= Prof/external audience and Instructor 6= All three types
Engagement	Level of engagement in writing indicated by the course syllabus	Scale	1= Disengaged: Little to no mention of writing assignment(s) in any part of course syllabus, unclear indication of writing assignment(s) 2= Least Engaged: Writing assignment indicated but not described or discussed 3= More Engaged: Writing assignment(s) mentioned and briefly described, briefly included in course objective(s) 4= Most Engaged: Writing component of course objective(s), detailed description, some or all instructions included (either in course syllabus, online, or at later date)

Our assessment variable measures the total grading weight of all writing assignments as a proportion of the final course grade and, at a basic level, signals the level of importance of writing to student outcomes. Faculty members subjectively assign values to exams, writing assignments, and other assignments based on their judgment of what is an important student outcome for that course and more generally, their discipline. All three pressures (normative, mimetic and coercive) are likely to have influenced the relative weight of writing in courses.

The audience variable measures the sophistication level of the intended audience for writing assignments included in the course requirements and are a reasonable indication of how well the course, and faculty member, incorporates discipline-specific writing intended for their professional audience. The basic audience level for all assignments is the instructor only, the default value for writing assignments with no identified audience. As the course and instructor better connect writing to the discipline, we expect that the audience identified by writing assignment(s) would increase in its level of sophistication beyond peers and the instructor to

include a professional or other external audience. For example, a health administration discipline-specific writing assignment might include a hospital board of directors, management staff, state or federal policy makers, or clinical professionals as the intended audience. A political science, physics, or psychology discipline-specific writing assignment might include scientific writing for an academic journal. The six-point scale developed and used to measure this variable explicitly assumes a hierarchy in the intended audience for student writing. The assigned values and hierarchy are supported by research. Expanding the intended audience was also included as a component of faculty workshop(s) on best practices in student writing, influencing the development of this scale. Furthermore, we recognize that increasing the sophistication of the audience level in writing assignments reflects the use of writing to achieve student outcomes such as critical thinking. Thus, we would expect through the combined process of mimicking and normative pressures (namely faculty workshops), faculty members were likely to increase their level of audience sophistication after the writing initiative was implemented.

Finally, the engagement variable measures the level of engagement of the course syllabus with writing and illustrates the extent to which the course and faculty member is likely to emphasize writing as a key student outcome and include discipline-specific writing as a key component of the course. This four-point scale was developed with the understanding, in part from faculty workshops, that creating explicit and detailed instructions for writing assignments is also a best practice in student writing. Coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures are likely to positively influence the level of engagement with writing evident in course syllabi.

## **Results and Discussion**

Measuring changes in these variables before and after the introduction of the new writing initiative is a good test of the extent to which faculty in this department implemented changes in writing in their courses in response to the WID initiative. Furthermore, while we expect to see change over time, our “after” time period was lagged by one semester to ensure sufficient time for faculty to adopt changes in writing and for us to observe those differences, if any change occurred. Using the two time periods previously identified as two separate groups for coded syllabi, we ran a two-group t-test and one-way ANOVA for each of the three key variables capturing writing in undergraduate courses.

Our results for the assessment variable, or total grading weight of writing assignments in proportion to the final course grade, show significant positive change after the writing plans were drafted and finalized at the department level. Table 2 identifies the results of the two-group t-test for this variable. The grading weight for writing assignments in all three programs shifted from a mean value of 23.99 percent to a mean value of 35.4 percent, confirming the hypothesis that the difference was greater than zero ( $p = 0.03$ ). This result was also confirmed by a one-way ANOVA testing the difference in mean grading weight of writing assignments across the two time periods. The mean significantly differed across the two time periods,  $F(1, 95) = 3.45, p = 0.06$ .

Table 2

*Two-Group T-Test for Grading Weight of Writing Assignment*

Group	N	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	95% CI
Fall 2009-Spring 2011	66	23.99	3.27	26.60	[17.46 - 30.53]
Fall 2011-Spring 2012	31	35.34	5.56	30.99	[23.97 - 46.71]
Combined	97	27.62	2.88	28.41	[21.89 - 33.35]
Difference		11.35	6.11		[-.78 - 23.47]

*Note. Degrees of freedom = 95*

Table 3 identifies results for the two-group t-test for the level of audience in writing assignments as identified in course syllabi. The mean audience level shifted significantly from 2.59 to 3.42 on our six-point scale, confirming the hypothesis that the difference is greater than zero ( $p = 0.05$ ). Referring to the values in our audience scale identified in Table 1, this signals that instructors shifted from on average identifying themselves and/or peers as the primary audience (a value of 1, 2, or 3) towards including an external/professional audience (a value of 4). The one-way ANOVA results weakly confirm that the mean level of audience for writing assignments significantly differed across the two time periods,  $F(1, 95) = 2.61, p = 0.10$ .

Table 3

*Two-Group T-Test for Sophistication of Audience*

Group	N	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	95% CI
Fall 2009-Spring 2011	66	2.59	.29	2.37	[2.01 - 3.17]
Fall 2011-Spring 2012	31	3.42	.42	2.33	[2.56 - 4.27]
Combined	97	2.86	.24	2.38	[2.38 - 3.33]
Difference		0.83	.51		[-.19 - 1.85]

*Note. Degrees of freedom = 95*

The average level of engagement of course syllabi with writing also increased from a mean value of 2.14 to 2.65 on our four-point scale, a significant difference across time periods ( $p = 0.04$ ). Results of the one-way ANOVA weakly confirm a significant difference between the two time periods,  $F(1,95) = 3.35, p = 0.07$ . It should be noted that we observed this positive shift in average engagement of the syllabi with writing despite ranking several course syllabi from the before time period extremely high on our engagement scale and experiencing a subsequent loss of that professor in the after time period.

Table 4

*Two-Group T-Test for Engagement of Syllabus with Writing*

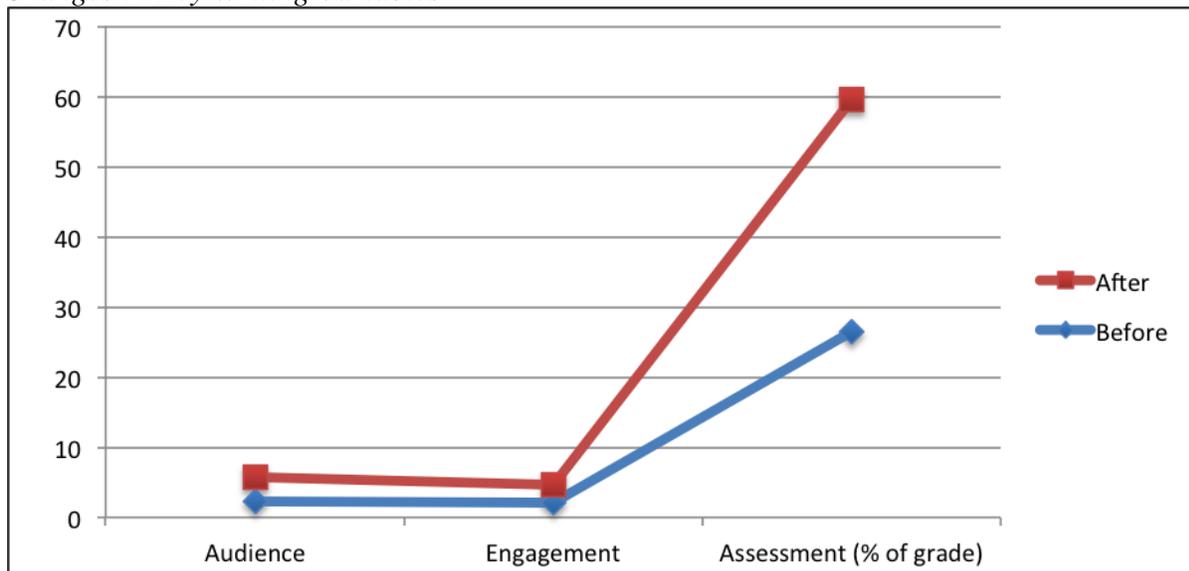
Group	N	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	95% CI
Fall 2009- Spring 2011	66	2.14	.17	1.35	[1.80 - 2.47]
Fall 2011- Spring 2012	31	2.65	.19	1.11	[2.24 - 3.05]
Combined	97	2.29	.13	1.29	[2.04 - 2.56]
Difference		0.51	.28		[-.04 - 1.06]

*Note. Degrees of freedom = 95*

Finally, Figure 1 presents a summary of observed changes in our key variables in the before (fall 2009- spring 2011) and after (fall 2011- spring 2012) time periods. The level of audience, with a higher number indicating writing assignments are written to a broader audience than just the student and/or instructor, increased from an average of 2.3 to 3.45 on our six-point scale. The level of engagement a course syllabus has with writing, indicated by the degree of attention and detail to which the course syllabus pays to writing, also increased from an average of 2.04 to 2.57 on our four-point scale. Finally, assessment or the weight of writing assignments as a proportion of the final course grade increased from an average of 26.43 percent to 33.10 percent. This figure illustrates changes in writing across the entire department, controlling for two majors that had previously established student writing as a key outcome as a result of outside accreditation.

Figure 1

*Changes in Key Writing Variables*



We expect that changes in the quantity and instruction of writing as exhibited in course syllabi for majors with an outside accrediting body would be additionally affected by the timing of the accreditation process and alignment of that process with the writing initiative. Changes in HADM were likely due to this type of coercive external pressure. HADM’s accrediting body

required the program to identify writing skills as an outcome for its program. However, recall that all programs within the department experienced internal coercion: All university departments were required to draft WID writing plans.

Most of the changes in POLI and PUBA, however, are likely a result of normative pressures strategically intended by the task force to create a culture of writing on campus. These included the expansion of the Miller Writing Center (now open to any major, previously only open to English class students), the introduction of student writing contests (open to any student), visible on-campus marketing campaigns, and faculty workshops, among other changes. Mimetic pressures may have caused some of the observed changes, though it is still unclear which ones. Departments and individual programs (POLI in this study) used completed writing plans from other departments as guides for developing their own plans, using those plans to determine how they would react to the WID initiative and what changes in student writing they were being advised to make.

### **Conclusions and Future Study**

Overall, our hypothesis is supported by our current data with each of the undergraduate programs having a significant positive change in the inclusion of writing, and we contend that this change was influenced by a combination of normative, mimetic, and coercive pressures in the institutional environment. This study complements efforts of an ongoing longitudinal study on this campus to focus on how the university-wide writing in the majors initiative has impacted faculty members and the courses they teach, the primary vehicle through which they enhance student writing. While poor student outcomes in writing were the impetus for the initiative, its design focuses on changing faculty attitudes and behavior toward student writing.

We conclude that a combination of normative, mimetic, and coercive pressures influence the adoption and implementation of a university-wide WID initiative that results in structural changes within the institution. Additional research could provide a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between each type of pressure and organizational change as well as the interaction effect of the pressures. We believe that this approach complements assertions by WAC and WID initiatives that a balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches must be struck to ensure successful diffusion and long-term sustainability. While the coercive pressures stemming from the initiative being viewed as a university mandate and from the accrediting bodies play a role in influencing change, we suspect that an academic major or department writing plan requirement is most effective in that it empowers faculty members as the agents of change. The faculty members' expertise and control over writing in their disciplines and courses was preserved by the university-established process of drafting writing plans, despite the possibility of mimetic pressure overriding the autonomy of a single major to draft a unique writing plan. In addition, normative pressure from engaging faculty, staff, and students in emphasizing writing as key student outcome enhanced the coercive aspect of the writing initiative. Mimetic pressure also worked to enhance normative pressure, helping to expand opportunities for faculty to learn best practices in student writing from their peers. The primary conclusion we reach from applying institutional theory to changes in writing at the major level is that empowering faculty members is key to a successful writing initiative, and that understanding the various influences on faculty members can assist in creating strategies to ensure successful

diffusion of WID initiatives. While this might be difficult, evidence suggests it increases the quantity of student writing opportunities in disciplinary courses, as well as the focus of writing assignments. In turn, through the increase in opportunities to write and to write for discipline-specific, professional audiences, students are better able to “connect the dots” of their knowledge and improve their critical thinking skills.

By applying a theoretical approach to institutional change, our study contributes to the understanding of how WAC and WID initiatives can approach and develop strategies to initiate change at the program level, specifically how writing in courses is approached by faculty. In identifying and discussing the effect of these three types pressures on faculty to adopt changes in writing at the course level, we also recognize specific university-wide efforts that were potential drivers of positive change, with the hopes of contributing to a better understanding of how to encourage faculty from disciplines that lack a strong writing focus to better commit to WAC or WID goals. A follow-up study could include collecting syllabi for one or more years after the full implementation of writing plans to determine whether the changes observed immediately after implementation are sustained over time. The sustainability of increased student writing opportunities is likely to be enhanced by ongoing promotional efforts of the WID program, administrative support of faculty engaged in WID, and associated pedagogical research, among other campus environmental or organizational factors. Studies on WID initiatives should also consider separating the effects on individual majors that have accrediting bodies from those that do not. We also recognize that course syllabi are not the only source of information on writing assignments within a course, and additional analysis of other course materials related to writing assignments could further enhance our understanding of the nature of the writing assignments and their incorporation of WID principles.

Future research on the effect of WID and WAC initiatives would benefit from comparing the effects of initiatives across campuses to further explore differences in the types of pressure and the success of campus-wide and department-specific writing initiatives. Further exploration of the institutional theory concepts of normative, mimetic and coercive pressures would consist of an operationalization of these concepts and collection of additional data, particularly a survey of faculty across campuses with similar writing initiatives.

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Appendix A

Table A1

*Variable Coding Scheme Utilized in Syllabus Study*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Measurement</b>
Assessment	Grading weight in course	Continuous	0 -100%
Audience	The type of audience for the writing assignment(s) identified in the course syllabus	Scale	1= Instructor only 2= Peers only 3= Instructor and Peers 4= Professional/external audience only 5= Prof/external audience and Instructor 6= All three types
Class Portfolio	Whether assignments are part of a course portfolio	Categorical	0= no 1= yes
Conception of Writing		Categorical	1= That writing is a vehicle for conveying information, demonstrating understanding, recording experiences, or convincing others 2= That writing is a product that has a rhetorical situation, is discipline-specific, requires practice, follows a genre/format, requires grammar and correctness, and is only revised to correct deficiencies 3= That writing is a process for thinking through on paper, engaging in conversation with others, learning content or concepts, and uses revision to foster these activities
	Whether the course syllabus identifies writing in the course objectives	Categorical	0 = no 1 = yes
Engagement	Level of engagement in writing indicated by the course syllabus	Scale	1= Disengaged: Little to mention of assignment(s) in any part of course syllabus, unclear indication of writing assignment(s) 2= Least Engaged: Written assignment indicated but not described or discussed 3= More Engaged: Writing assignment(s) mentioned and briefly described, briefly included in course objective(s) 4= Most Engaged: Writing component of course objective(s), detailed description, some or all instructions

			included (either in course syllabus, online, or at later date)
Group Component	Whether the writing assignment includes a group component	Categorical	0 = no 1 = yes
Presentation Component	Whether the writing assignment includes a presentation component	Categorical	0 = no 1 = yes
Purpose	The stated or assumed purpose of the writing assignment as identified by the course syllabus	Categorical	1= Learn content 2= Hone writing skills 3= Hone/develop research skills 4= Hone presentation/communication skills 5= Hone critical thinking skills 6= Group/teamwork 7= Hone professional/discipline-specific skills 8= Data analysis/market research 9= Capstone experience
Revision	Whether there are opportunities for revision identified by the course syllabus	Categorical	0 = no 1 = yes
Type of Assignment	The type of writing assignment identified by the course syllabus	Categorical	0= No Assignment 1= Scholarly Writing 2= Professional Writing 3= Professional Communication 4= Informal Communication

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