

TO: Faculty Senate Executive Committee
FROM: University Curriculum Committee
DATE: March 3, 2016
RE: Recommendations Based on DCAC report on Written Communication Assessment

As you know, the University Curriculum Committee and the Drake Curriculum Assessment Committee have been collaborating more this academic year, as stipulated in the resolution passed by Senate in spring 2015. At its February 2016 meeting, the UCC had an opportunity to review and discuss DCAC's Written Communication Assessment Summary report. In light of ongoing Senate conversations about revising Drake's general education curriculum, UCC wishes to forward some recommendations based on DCAC's findings.

We hope that Senate will do the following when working toward curricular reform:

1. **Consider the mission-based curricular outcome that UCC drafted in response to Senate's fall 2015 request: "Drake students will have the ability to communicate in a persuasive, engaging manner appropriate for their audience."** This promise to our students should guide decisions about writing requirements within any new version of the Drake curriculum.
2. **Pay particular attention to the first-year experience.** Our current First-Year Seminar program is meant to provide incoming Drake students with a writing-intensive learning experience, and though we have seen progress toward this goal (for example, Jody Swilky's work with faculty and staff across campus) sections still vary a great deal in the amount of attention paid to writing instruction and practice. If the FYS program remains part of Drake's curriculum, this issue must be addressed, especially since students arrive at Drake with differing abilities and educational backgrounds. One way of addressing the issue might be to require training for all new FYS instructors so that they are equipped with the appropriate skill set for teaching first-year writing.
3. **Address and develop departmental interest in field-specific writing instruction.** As DCAC's report notes, "The quality of writing varied in all sampled courses and across criteria, suggesting that developing writing skills is a long-term learning process which warrants ongoing attention." This comment implies that just one course taken to fulfill a general education requirement may not do as much as we might like to fulfill our promise to students (see #1 above).

4. **In summary, find ways to foster a “writing-intensive culture.”** Without a curriculum in place that supports writing and communication skills, students’ abilities in these areas are unlikely to improve, especially since learning to write is a long-term, holistic process that goes well beyond the parameters of one course requirement. Some ideas for fostering a writing-intensive culture include requiring that all AOI courses (not just those in the Written Communication category) include some sort of writing component, encouraging more students to make use of the Writing Workshop, expanding the Workshop, and developing more “Writing Across the Curriculum” opportunities.

UCC also expressed willingness to revisit, and possibly revise, the Written Communication AOI and guidelines as needed. If you have questions or comments about this document, please contact UCC chair Megan Brown (megan.brown@drake.edu). Thank you for your time.