

Executive Summary: Subcommittee for Writing and Reading Report on the Comprehensive Writing Program

Overview

As a result of a 2005 Faculty Senate Retreat break-out session, the Subcommittee for Writing and Reading was charged with reviewing the Comprehensive Writing Program policies with a special consideration for:

- stricter sequencing of writing requirements
- improvements to the GVAR
- infusing writing more broadly across the curriculum

The following is an executive summary of the Subcommittee's report to the Senate. This executive summary includes a Comprehensive Writing Program Outcomes Statement from the Subcommittee and recommendations for improvements to the Comprehensive Writing Program at the lower division and the upper division. The recommendations are based on the Senate's charge to the Subcommittee; the Subcommittee's statement of learning outcomes for the Comprehensive Writing Program; position statements on the teaching and assessing of writing from the primary professional organizations in the field of Composition Studies, the National Council of Teachers of English and the Conference on College Composition and Communication; the recommendations of external reviewers from the Council of Writing Program Administrators; the research on writing across the curriculum, and model programs from other CSUs.

Comprehensive Writing Program Outcomes Statement

The Subcommittee came to a consensus on the following shared outcomes for the Comprehensive Writing Program:

- Students will write in a variety of rhetorical situations: for a variety of audiences and purposes in a variety of genres, both print and multimedia.
- Students will use writing to learn: to invent, draft, and revise; to explore their own ideas and experiences; and to discover what they have to say in both formal and informal, exploratory writing assignments.
- Students will engage in writing as a process that includes invention, revision, and editing, and receive feedback from peers and instructors throughout the writing process.
- Students will learn to use a variety of reading strategies, read a variety of print and electronic texts, and use writing to analyze, evaluate, and reflect upon what they've read.
- Students will engage in extended research and learn to enter into the discourse communities of their disciplines: to cite, synthesize, and evaluate multiple sources.
- Students will write and read frequently at all stages of their writing career in a sequence that begins with composition courses and moves toward writing in the major.
- Students will understand that writing is a critical tool for learning content knowledge as well as an important ability for their careers beyond the university.
- Faculty will view the responsibility for teaching writing as campus-wide and appreciate the value of using writing to initiate students to the ways of thinking of their discipline.
- Faculty will feel invested in the Comprehensive Writing Program and play a greater role in the campus-wide teaching and assessment of writing.
- Faculty will be given the support needed to help improve student literacy across disciplines and will be rewarded for integrating more reading and writing in their courses.

The outcomes statement provides the underlying principles for the Subcommittee's recommendations for improving the Comprehensive Writing Programs at the lower and upper division.

Recommendations for the Comprehensive Writing Program: Lower Division

The sequencing of the Comprehensive Writing Program at the lower division includes **developmental** preparatory writing courses offered through Learning Skills and the English Department, ENGL1A: College Composition I or **ENGL2: College Composition for Multilingual Students**, and ENGL 20: College Composition II or **ENGL20M: College Composition II for Multilingual Students**. The Subcommittee also acknowledges the importance of collaboration between Sacramento State and high schools with programs such as the EAP, which help underprepared high school writers. The Subcommittee feels the lower-division writing courses form an effective sequence, but we believe steps can be taken to improve this sequence. The Subcommittee makes the following five recommendations for improving the Comprehensive Writing Program at the lower division:

Recommendation #1: Reduce remediation and improve the **developmental preparatory writing sequence by lowering English Placement Test (EPT) cut scores and providing more group tutorial support for students at the lower range of the cut scores.**

This recommendation is based on data that show that when we lowered the EPT cut scores from 151 to 149 for ENGL1A and **ENGL2** placement and from 149 to 147 for ENGL1A/1X and **ENGL2/1X placement**, students showed remarkable success. We believe that as long as students are given tutorial support, cut scores can continue to be lowered.

The task force proposes changing the EPT cut score placement to the following:

EPT Score	Placement	Multilingual Placement (EPT+EDT*)
148	ENGL 1A and Writing Center tutoring	ENGL 2 and Writing Center tutoring
146 and 147	ENGL 1A and 1X (group tutorial)	ENGL 2 and 1X (group tutorial)
144-145	ENGL 1	LS87
142-143	ENGL 1 and 1X	LS87 and group tutorial

***Multilingual students will be placed according to their EPT score and a multilingual evaluation resulting in an English Diagnostic Test score that places them into a parallel sequence of courses.**

Streamlining the **developmental** preparatory writing sequence in this manner will reduce time to degree and help to meet the CSU Chancellor's Office's goal of reduction in remediation while at the same time providing more support for underprepared student writers at no extra cost.

Recommendation #2: Improve the lower division writing sequence by requiring students to complete the first-year composition requirement (ENGL1A or ENGL2) by the beginning of their first semester of junior standing (60) units. Students who do not meet this policy requirement will have holds placed on their registration when they complete 74 units.

Sequencing of the Comprehensive Writing Program was a primary concern discussed at the Senate retreat break-out session. Requiring students to complete ENGL1A or **ENGL2** by the time they are juniors will help encourage the students who need the most help to complete their developmental writing course sequence and take ENGL1A/**ENGL2** in a timely manner.

Recommendation #3: Provide more student and faculty support and infuse writing more broadly across the curriculum by charging the Subcommittee for Writing and Reading with creating or choosing a cross-disciplinary writing handbook for Sacramento State that could be used university-wide and required in composition courses.

The handbook could be custom-published for Sacramento State and include writing assignments and rubrics from Sacramento State faculty, example Sacramento State student essays, resources for writing in various disciplines, citation style guides, information about campus writing resources, etc. A large-scale adoption of a handbook would also mean support from the publisher for faculty development (for example, the publisher could provide a workshop for a department about using the handbook and associated online exercises to teach students APA style).

Recommendation #4: Improve the sequencing of ENGL20/ENGL20M to encourage students to take it in their sophomore year and curtail students putting off the course until as late as their senior year by reinstating the 30 unit prerequisite and making ENGL20/ENGL20M a prerequisite for the GWAR.

The arguments for no additional prerequisite seem to be that freshmen might more easily register for the course and that freshmen seem to be successful in the course. The arguments for reinstating the 30-unit prerequisite seem to be that the course was designed for sophomores (students with enough experience to bring to bear on a more advanced writing class and to serve as a transition between freshman composition and the junior-level writing-intensive requirement and writing in their major), that sophomores constitute the majority of the course enrollment (so the original enrollment concern has been met), and that the most recent outside evaluators recommended the course be sophomore-level. As the preponderance of information supports the use of this course as a sophomore writing class, the Subcommittee recommends the 30-unit requirement be reinstated. Although there are prerequisites for ENGL20/ENGL20M, the course itself is not officially a prerequisite for anything. The result of this is that a course which was designed to help students transition between their freshman and junior years of writing is often taken by students in their senior year. The Subcommittee recommends that ENGL20/ENGL20M be made a prerequisite for taking the junior-level Writing Intensive class.

Recommendation #5: Improve the transition from ENGL1A/ENGL2 to upper division writing in the major by revising the course description and goals of ENGL20/ENGL20M so that it has a “writing-in-the-disciplines” focus and provides students with a broad introduction to academic discourse and discourse analysis as well as gives students opportunities to begin to investigate the writing conventions of their major and read and analyze expository writing from a variety of disciplines.

Since ENGL20/ENGL20M's original creation, much more work in the field of Writing Across the Curriculum has been done in designing courses that work toward preparing students to write in a variety of disciplinary styles. These new writing-in-the-disciplines courses focus more specifically on the various genres and conventions of the different discourses within the university. Because ENGL20/ENGL20M is situated between the more general academic writing taught in freshman composition and the more specific writing taught in upper division GE and major courses, it would seem a logical shift, then, to re-design ENGL20/ENGL20M toward a writing-in-the-disciplines focus to aid in students' writing growth and transition. The Subcommittee, therefore, recommends that the focus of ENGL20/ENGL20M be shifted to a more standardized, writing-in-the-disciplines approach which focuses on discourse analysis of various genres and disciplines.

Recommendations for the Comprehensive Writing Program: Upper Division

The Comprehensive Writing Program sequence in the upper division consists of the Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) and the Writing Intensive (WI) requirement. The Subcommittee makes the following four recommendations for improving the Comprehensive Writing Program at the upper division:

Recommendation #1: The Subcommittee recommends a modification to the GVAR that we feel will improve its construct validity and predictive validity as an assessment of student preparedness for writing in the major and align it more closely to writing assessment “best practices.” We recommend that a course (the Writing Intensive course) rather than a single instance of timed writing (the WPE) satisfy the GVAR.

There is a large body of research in the field of writing assessment that has questioned whether a single, timed test like the WPE can measure whether or not a student is prepared for writing in their major. High-stakes timed writing tests have been shown to have a weak predictive validity (between .4 and .6), meaning they predict students’ success at college writing only between 40% and 60% of the time. High stakes timed tests are also wanting in construct validity: a single test is no substitute for a writing-and-reading-rich course in the discipline. Although the Subcommittee feels that the WPE should be retained as a placement exam, it should not satisfy the GVAR. We recommend that the WI course, rather than the WPE, satisfy the GVAR.

Recommendation #2: The Subcommittee recommends a further modification to the GVAR that we feel will streamline the GVAR process, reduce remediation, increase student morale, and offer more emphasis on student support and less emphasis on high-stakes, timed testing. We recommend that the WPE serve as a challenge exam for 109W/109M. Students can elect to take 109W/109M or take the WPE as a challenge exam: if they elect to take the WPE, based on their score in the exam they will be placed in 109W/109M, the WI course, or the WI course plus one unit of 3X (a group writing tutorial that can be supported through savings from having fewer sections of 109W/109M).

Currently students are placed into 109W/109M after twice failing to get the needed score on the WPE, creating low student morale for the course. The Subcommittee recommends giving students the option of taking 109W/109M or the WPE, thus turning the WPE into a challenge exam and removing some of the “remedial” stigma of 109W/109M.

Recommendation #3: In addition to recommending the creation of 3X, a group writing tutorial, as a third placement option for the WPE, the Subcommittee recommends at some point in the future opening 3X to all upper-division students who would like to register for a small group tutorial as an inexpensive means to support students and faculty at the upper division.

By opening 3X to all upper-division students who would like more help with their writing, the university could create an inexpensive way to support both students and faculty. Because this would take additional funding, the Subcommittee recommends piloting a few open sections of 3X with initial seed money and then expanding the program if it proves successful.

Recommendation #4: To help initiate students to the specialized discourse of their chosen discipline, the Subcommittee recommends adoption of the 2002 “Transmission of GVAR” proposal, which was endorsed by the Subcommittee and the General Education/Graduation Requirements Policies Committee. This proposal recommended that the WI requirement be revised to a Writing-in-the-Discipline requirement, so that students take a WI course in their discipline ~~in their junior year~~.

Even the most accomplished student writers struggle when they are first learning the specialized discourse of their discipline: each discipline has its own genres, its own discourse conventions, and its own ways of generating knowledge through reading and writing. This recommendation would create a more coherent and logical sequence of student writing experiences in the Comprehensive Writing Program: students would receive an introduction to college writing and the writing process in their freshman year in ENGL1A/ENGL2, begin to explore writing, reading, and research across disciplines in their sophomore year in ENGL20/ENGL20M, and then receive an initiation to the specialized discourse of their discipline ~~in their junior year~~.

Under this plan, each student would satisfy the GVAR through an upper-division writing-intensive course in their major or a relevant course outside the major designated by their department. This course should be content-

rich in the discipline and also integrate instruction in disciplinary writing. The writing-in-the-discipline course could be developed by the department in four ways:

1. Departments could identify a course or courses within the major that already meet the WI guidelines and designate it (or them) to fulfill the requirement for its majors.
2. Departments could select a content course within the major to fulfill the WI requirement and alter its design to meet the guidelines.
3. Departments could work in conjunction with other departments to develop a college-wide course that meets the writing intensive course requirement for its majors. This could be accomplished a) when more than one department has majors which do similar writing or b) departments could plan a WI course with disciplinary writing texts to be offered through the English department, supported financially by the major department but conducted through the English department.
4. Departments could identify a course or courses outside the major that already meet WI guidelines and connect to the writing done in the discipline of the major and designate it (or them) to fulfill the requirements for its majors.

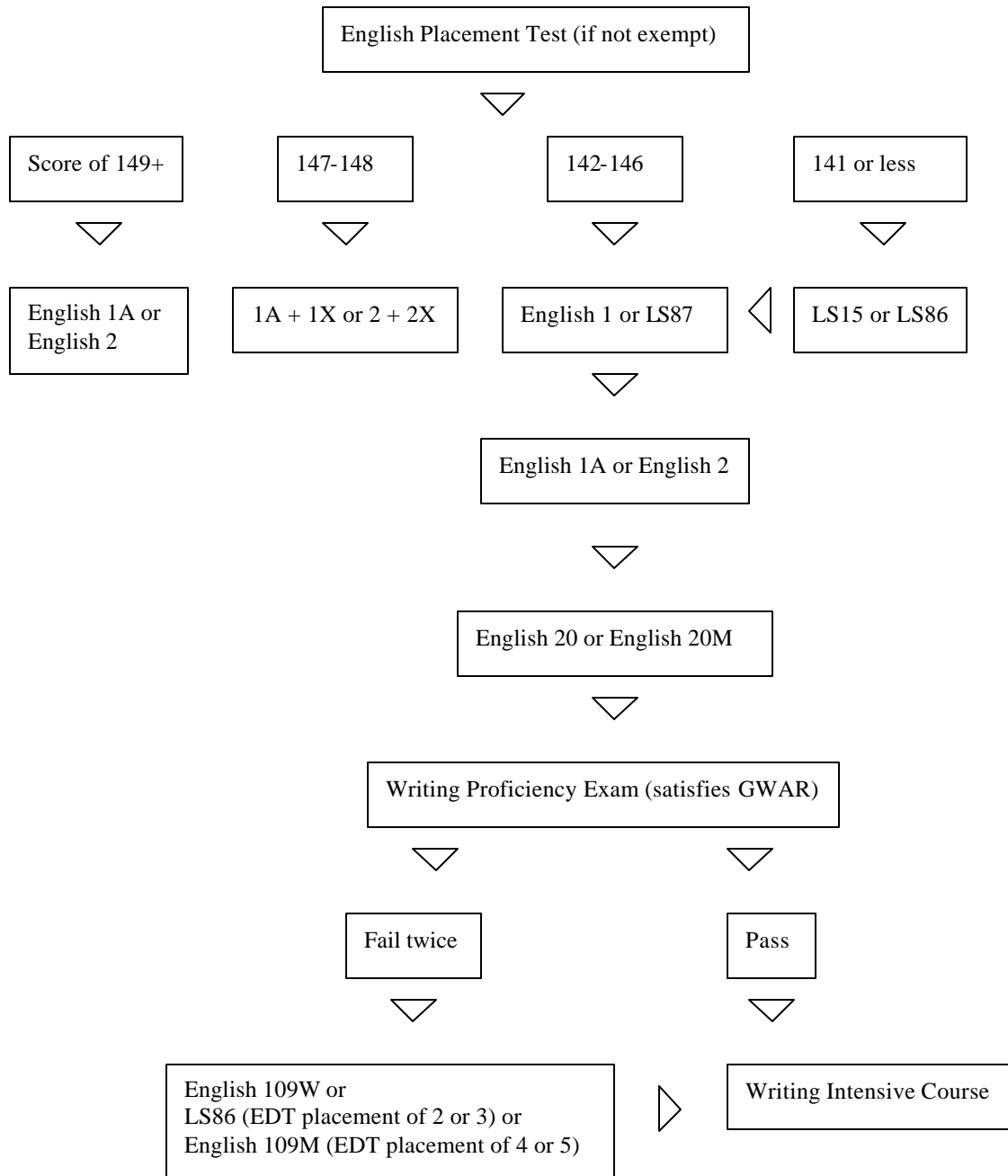
The Writing-in-the-Discipline requirement would replace the current Writing Intensive requirement, so it would not add units to the major. Support for developing the courses would be provided by the University Reading and Writing Coordinator. Adjunct tutoring support for students and instructors could be provided by 3X and Writing Across the Curriculum's "Tutoring in the Disciplines" program, which trains and sponsors writing tutors for a department or college if the department or college provides matching funds.

The Subcommittee would not want a single writing-in-the-discipline course to be seen as a replacement for integrating writing throughout the major. However, the Subcommittee feels that the current WI requirement does not fall within a coherent sequence, especially with the proposed changes to ENGL20/ENGL20M and the request by the Senate to infuse writing more broadly in each discipline. The assumption behind this recommended change, and behind all the changes the Subcommittee recommends in this report, is that student literacy is a goal and a responsibility we all share.

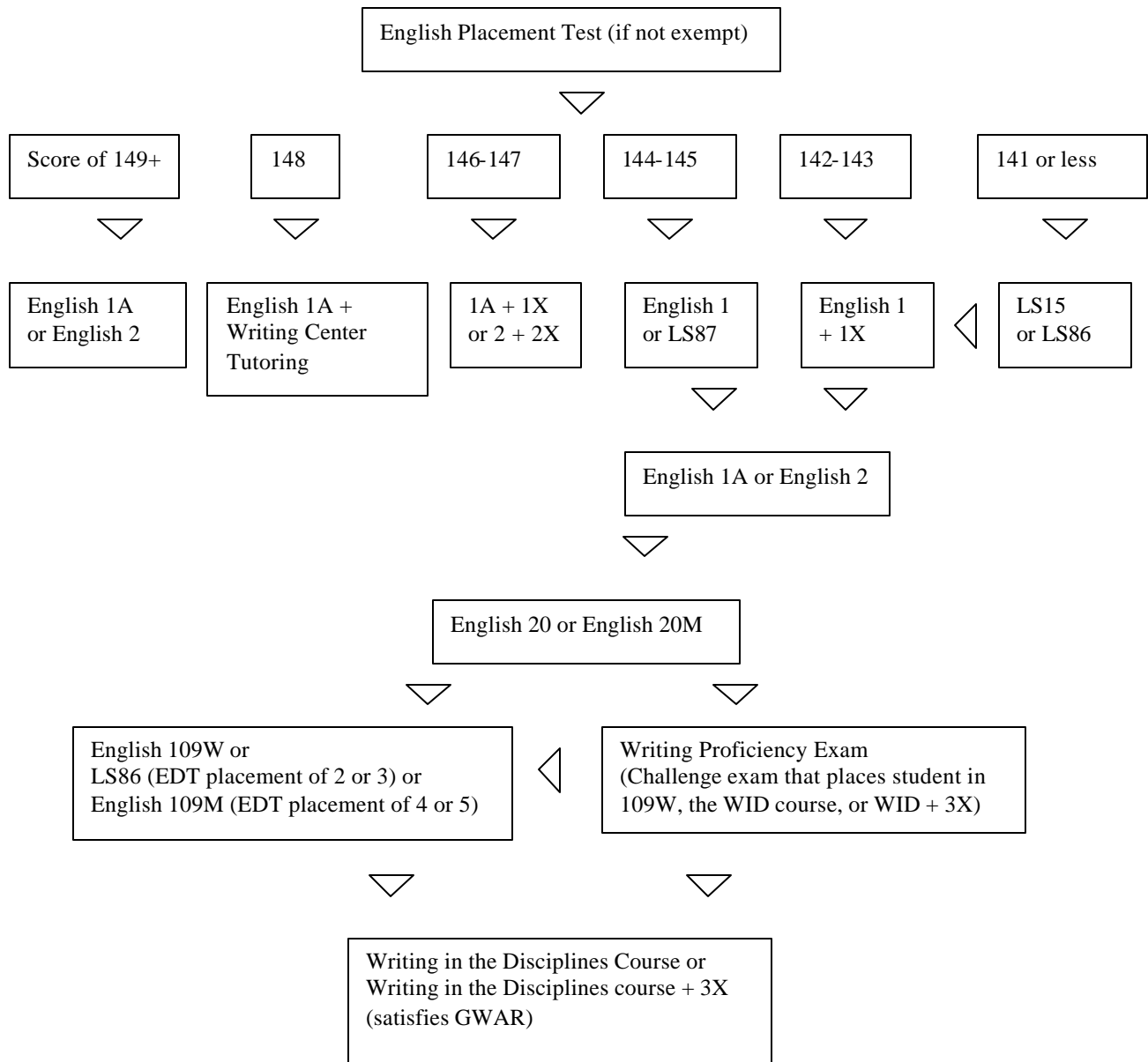
Appendix A: Members of the Subcommittee for Writing and Reading, Fall 2005-Spring 2006

Dan Melzer, Chair, University Reading and Writing Coordinator
Greg Wheeler, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies
Fiona Glade, GVAR Coordinator.
Robby Ching, Learning Skills Coordinator
Amy Heckathorn, Writing Programs Coordinator
Nancy Lapp, Center for Teaching and Learning representative, Fall 2005
Jan Andersen, Center for Teaching and Learning representative, Spring 2006
Shelagh Nugent, Learning Skills
Hugh Wilson, College of Health and Human Services, Fall 2005
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Chris Taylor, College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics

Appendix B: Comprehensive Writing Program Flow Chart



Appendix C: Proposed Revised Comprehensive Writing Program Flow Chart



Appendix D: Annotated Bibliography of Research on Writing in the Disciplines

National Research

Longitudinal Studies of College Writing

- Caroll, L. (2002). *Rehearsing new roles: How college students develop as writers*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Herrington, A., & Curtis, M. (2000) *Persons in process: Four stories of writing and personal development in college*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.
- Sternglass, Marilyn. (1997). *Time to know them: a longitudinal study of writing and learning at the college level*. Mahwah, N.J. : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

The authors of these three longitudinal studies of college student writing from freshman to senior year came to similar conclusion regarding writing in the disciplines based on their research: writing and thinking is discipline-specific, even good writers regress when they are initiated into ways of thinking and writing of their discipline, and writing skills atrophy if students do not get writing-rich instruction in the upper division.

Case Studies of Writing across Disciplines

- McCarthy, L. (1987). A stranger in strange lands: A college student writing across the curriculum. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 21.3, 233-264.
- Swales, J. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Walvoord, B., & McCarthy, L. (1991). *Thinking and writing in college: a naturalistic study of students in four disciplines*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Results of case study research show that writing purposes and conventions vary dramatically from discipline to discipline, and that students benefit from instructor response that is discipline-specific. The case study research also shows that learning disciplinary genres is especially difficult for students as they enter their major, and requires significant practice and feedback during the writing process.

Research on Workplace Writing

- Odell, L (Ed). (1985). *Writing in nonacademic settings*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Spilka, R. (Ed.). (1993). *Writing in the workplace: New research perspectives*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press.

Collections of workplace writing research, including surveys and ethnographic studies. Studies of workplace writing reveal a number of patterns: employees spend a significant amount of their time at work writing, writing is critical to advancement, and there are a variety of workplace genres. Employees report that they felt the college curriculum did not do enough to prepare them for these discipline-specific genres and conventions.

Research on Writing and Class Size

- Astin, A.W. (1993). *What matters in college?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- McKeachie, W.J. (1980). Class size, large classes, and multiple sections. *Academe*, 66, 24-27.
- Pascarella, E.T., & Terenzini, P.T. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Studies of student learning which show that increasing class size has a negative effect on student writing and learning and decreases the amount of writing students do and the amount of feedback they receive on their writing.

Campus Research

2002 Faculty Writing Survey

Survey of 252 CSUS faculty from across disciplines. 78% of faculty surveyed report that student writing is an “extremely important” outcome and 69% say quality of student writing was an item of programmatic concern for their department, but 58% say large class enrollment is a challenge for incorporating writing assignments in their classes.

1997 WASC Self-Study Survey of CSUS Alumni

A survey of 291 alumni reports that “although the performance of most majors in ‘providing a broad knowledge of theories and principles’ was superior (84% positive), its performance in providing ‘preparation for a future occupation’ was much less satisfactory (46% positive).” Most respondents were employed in jobs highly related to their degree (59%); only 14 percent reported that their degrees and jobs were unrelated.

2004/2005 Writing Across the Curriculum Survey of Alumni Writing

Pilot survey of 40 alumni from across disciplines who are now working in Sacramento. Alumni reported that writing ability was critical for job retention and promotion, and that more practice in writing in their major would have been helpful, especially in “technical” fields.

2003 OIR Student Achievement Study

Survey of faculty and students in 40 sections of upper-division capstone courses across disciplines. The survey asked questions about writing, reading, technology, and amount of study time in upper-division courses. The survey found “students are only occasionally given writing assignments that might challenge them to use a range of learning strategies. The most frequently assigned writing tasks are the writing of short answer questions on exams and quizzes and the writing of essays in response to test questions.” Students reported spending little study time on drafting and revising essays for upper-division courses, and the data “paints a portrait of a student body that is routinely asked to demonstrate their knowledge through writing responses on tests rather than developing reports, essays, or articles to synthesize and integrate information in the service of an argument.”