

2009 Writing Across the Curriculum Survey on Second Level Writing Courses at Ohio State (Short Version)

Introduction

During winter quarter 2009, the [Writing Across the Curriculum](#) (WAC) program at the [Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing](#) (CSTW) surveyed faculty and instructors of second-level writing courses across the Columbus campus of Ohio State. We wanted to understand how instructors teach writing in these courses, what support for teaching instructors receive, and what challenges they continue to face with student learning.

No one department or administrative unit directs the course, so the content, training, status of instructors, and support structures can vary greatly across the university. Given the unique position of 367 in the university, we felt that instructors, course directors, departments, and administrators would find information about the course useful for developing support structures or making use of existing support within the university. The conversion to semesters offers an opportunity for departments to reevaluate how they support their instructors as they redesign curricula and consider how they will be staffing the courses.

[For a more detailed analysis of the survey, see the long version of this report.](#)

Who Teaches 367 and How They Are Supported

Of the 26 departments offering 367:

- In 12 departments, the course is taught by a small number of regular faculty or lecturers (rarely including GTAs, except as assistants to a faculty member) once a quarter or even once a year.
- In 6 departments, a group of GTAs as well as a few faculty or staff teach a few sections of the course each quarter.
- In another 6 departments, larger pools of graduate student instructors teach different versions of a course with several sections each quarter.
- The Department of English offers the largest number of sections each quarter, and graduate student instructors regularly move between a range of teaching opportunities in the department, resulting in higher turnover in instructors from quarter to quarter.

Among those who responded to the survey, 75% are GTAs, 13% are teaching staff (including part time and full time lecturers), and 11% are faculty. Among the GTAs who responded, 78% identified themselves as Ph.D. students, while 22% identified as Masters students. 70% of the faculty who responded identified themselves as senior faculty and 30% as junior faculty.

Our survey data suggests that although many 367 instructors have significant college-level teaching experience, quite a few do not, making support structures for new teachers a crucial need for many departments.

- 63% of respondents had been teaching college-level courses for four years or more
- 19% had been teaching for more than 15 years
- 38% had been teaching at the college level for 3 or fewer years
- 13% had been teaching for less than one year

While 70% of instructors surveyed agreed somewhat, agreed, or strongly agreed that they had received adequate training to teach a writing course for their department, 30% reported that they did not feel prepared to teach the course. Significantly, there was a wide variation from department to department on this question, ranging from as high as 100% to as low as 28% among departments who had four or more respondents.

Our respondents seemed to value the presence of a faculty coordinator and some initial training before entering the classroom. We were able to loosely correlate confidence in the classroom with particular kinds of

support and training.

- For respondents who identified faculty coordinators (60% of respondents), 81% felt well prepared.
- For respondents who identified no support or oversight (11% of respondents), only 57% felt prepared. For respondents who identified as either lecturer or GTA and identified no support or oversight, only 33% felt prepared to teach 367.
- 60% of respondents identified some sort of required training before teaching; of those 60% of respondents, 86% felt prepared to teach a writing course in their department.
- 40% of respondents identified no required training before teaching; of those, only 45% felt prepared to teach a writing course.

What and How They Teach Writing

Instructors who responded to the survey generally made sure that most of their students' work was written. 57% of instructors reported that all of their assignments involved some kind of writing, and only 11% reported that half or less of assignments involved writing.

While the 367 instructors who participated in the survey gave assignments that involved a lot of writing, they spent comparatively little time in class on writing. Nearly 70% of those surveyed spent less than a third of time in class on activities related to writing. This finding suggests that much of class time is spent on content-oriented issues distinguished from writing. ***According to our survey, most writing instruction occurs through out-of-class activities or feedback, built into some recursive process of drafting and revising.***

Our survey results demonstrate that respondents have radically different perspectives on students' strengths and challenges. These differences, we would argue, are likely informed by the varying individual and disciplinary preferences that instructors have for student writing.

[For an account of respondents' views on issues like plagiarism, technology and international student writers, see our long report.](#)

Summary of Recommendations

One of the central findings of the survey was the fact that GTAs (who make up 75% of those teaching 367) report feeling more prepared to teach the course in correlation with receiving particular kinds of support. WAC, UCAT, and other teaching support units on campus can supplement the faculty supervisor and departmental training, working either with departmental groups, or directly with individual instructors.

While our findings suggest there is a need for increased support for the second-level writing course throughout the university and in the various departments, many resources are already available to all teachers:

- Faculty advisors unsure about how to prepare 367 instructors for the classroom can request a [workshop from WAC](#) for their departments.
- Instructors unsure how to approach a challenging writing issue with their students can [set up a consultation](#) with a member of the WAC team to develop assignments and/or in-class activities, or work with the WAC team on [an in-class collaboration](#) for their students.
- Instructors who want to explore issues related to teaching with instructors from across the university can attend workshops offered by [WAC,UCAT](#) or the [Digital Union](#).

WAC has sponsored and will continue to sponsor a series of seminars, book groups, and other events especially for second-level writing teachers. These sessions offer continued support after initial training, and they help build a learning community of instructors who can share their experiences and challenges in the classroom. In our work, we have found that instructors appreciate the opportunity to discuss their teaching with colleagues, whether they are veterans or new to the classroom.