Form E-1-A for Boston College Departments/Programs

English Department: First-Year Writing (FWS): Core Writing Program

1) **Learning Outcomes**: The FWS Program has had formal learning outcomes since 2004. They were most recently revised in 2015. They read as follows:

Outcomes for the Boston College First-Year Writing Seminar

By the end of First-Year Writing students should be able to do the following:

Rhetorical Knowledge

- Focus on a purpose in their writing
- Respond to the needs of different audiences
- Respond appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations, including but not limited to academic rhetorical situations
- Write in several genres

Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing

- Use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating
- Understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources
- Integrate their own ideas with those of others

Processes

- Be aware that it usually takes multiple drafts to create and complete a successful text
- Develop flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading
- Understand writing as an open process that permits writers to use later invention and re-thinking to revise their work
- Understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes
- Learn to critique their own and others' works
- Learn to balance the advantages of relying on others with the responsibility of doing their part

Knowledge of Conventions

- Learn common formats for different kinds of texts
- Develop knowledge of genre conventions ranging from structure and paragraphing to tone and mechanics
- Practice appropriate means of documenting their work
- Control such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Composing in Electronic Environments

- Use electronic environments for drafting, reviewing, revising, editing, and sharing texts
- Locate, evaluate, organize, and use research material collected from electronic sources, including scholarly library databases; other official databases (e.g., federal government databases); and informal electronic networks and internet sources
- Understand and exploit the differences in the rhetorical strategies and in the affordances available for both print and electronic composing processes and texts

2) These learning outcomes are published in our mentoring guidelines and on our website, listed under resources for faculty: https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/mcas/departments/english/about/learning-outcomes.html

3) **Assessment**

We conducted an external review of the FWS Program in 2011 facilitated by the Council of Writing Program Administrators. The assessment required an in-depth self-study and resulted in a detailed report from the evaluators (housed within FWS program).

We began an internal assessment of student writing in 2013, where we chose one outcome (critical reading and writing) to assess. We asked all instructors to submit three essays where all instructor and student names had been removed. We performed a two---step process: a norming session to determine what we meant by a 2, 3, 4 or 5 in each category. Then we randomly selected essays to evaluate.

4) **Assessment Process:**

A committee of composition staff (the faculty director and three instructors and program mentors) performed the assessment: one selected a range of essays for the other three to norm. Then we all worked together to assess a random group of essays.

5) **Results and Current Innovations**

In short, we found that students were engaging in critical reading and writing fairly well but could use improvement in putting themselves into conversation with sources and ideas of other writers. (A detailed report of this assessment is available. Please email mathiepa@bc.edu for a copy.) Our results have prompted the following innovations:

1. Since 2014, we have adopted new approaches to teaching and mentoring new instructors, drawing specifically on Joseph Harris's *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts,* to focus on helping students work critically and creatively with the words and ideas of others.

2. In 2015, we formally added a requirement to FWS: At least one assignment should ask students to work critically with an academic text and put it into conversation with other texts and ideas.

3. In fall 2017 we adopted a new textbook to be used by our graduate Teaching Fellows to use in their FWS class: *Habits of the Curious Mind* (edited by Richard Miller), which provides many intellectual activities for helping students work with and inquire through texts. We will continue testing this book this fall.

4. Thanks to a 2015 TAM grant, we completed a mentoring handbook, to help train FWS mentors, who play a key role in training graduate students in revising their syllabi and making lesson plans. They coach TFs throughout the summer before teaching, and during the year meet regularly and visit classes.

5. In Spring 2017, working with Julian Bourg, Dean of the Core, the FWS Program wrote the following mission statement, to share the goals of the program widely:

   The FWS Program invites students to explore why one writes, in order to help them see writing as an intellectual and personal tool for living that can be developed and honed.
   Writing-core courses ask students to write and rewrite in a variety of genres, discuss their works-in-progress in class, and receive individualized feedback from their instructors. Classroom activities center around the ways writing and revising help reveal new insights, orient ourselves to broader conversations, deepen our ability to communicate with others, express what is important to us, and create changes in service of the common good.

6. In Spring 2018, Paula Mathieu revamped ENGL8825, the graduate seminar to prepare new teachers of writing, to focus more directly on writing-to-learn activities and meaningful writing and to make the development of syllabi and assignments even more central to the work of the course. She invited both outside presenters to take part in the course and arranged for a highly effective graduate instructor (Mary Crane) to visit the class to offer feedback and support. It is an ongoing goal of the FWS program to continue to improve its preparation and support for all FWS faculty.

7. Through the Core Renewal Program, Paula Mathieu, FWS Director, will be teaching an Enduring Questions paired course with Lisa Friedman in Educational Psychology, for Fall 2018. The course will be Writing for Social Action, which will be paired with a core social science course on inequality in the US and approaches at social transformation. Another pilot FWS course will be taught in fall 2018 by Eileen Donovan-Kranz, Writing as Activism, which will be open to students in the PULSE and other service programs. These pilot courses seek to rethink how students might engage in meaningful writing and the course's relationship to the core overall. We will evaluate these core courses in 2018-9 and consider plan for moving forward.

8. On May 24 and 25, 2018 the Boston College First-Year Writing Program hosted the 7th Annual Boston Rhetoric and Writing Network (BRAWN) Summer Institute, which is a free institute, open by application, to teachers of college-level writing in the Boston area. The institute, which was supported with funds from Boston University, Northeastern, and U Mass Boston as well as Boston College, hosted 80 teachers of writing for two days with two keynote addresses by prominent local scholars (Neal Lerner from Northeastern and Tamera Marko from Emerson College) and 15 workshops on topics ranging from anti-racist assessment practices to visual learning strategies and designing effective writing prompts. Seven BC FWS faculty took part in the Institute. BC will host the institute again in 2019.

9. Writing Center Pilot: The FWS Director, the Director of ELL Writing and the Director of the Writing Fellows Program prepared a successful TAM proposal to start a pilot BC Writing Center in January of 2019. While this program is not directly related the FWS Program, we see the development of more effective, curious, and reflective writers a shared goal of FWS and a BC Writing Center, and we look forward to FWS students possibly having ongoing writing resources beyond this one seminar.

6) **Going Forward:**

- Currently 83% of FWS classes are taught by graduate-student Teaching Fellows or adjunct faculty, which means only 17% of our students take FWS with an instructor who has a long-term relationship with BC. To better teach and serve our students, the English Department has requested three Professors of the Practice slots to help bring more full-time instructors into the English Core. We strongly feel that a more stable, consistent teaching faculty will be a strong asset to the program and the students.
- *Habits of the Creative* Mind focuses on a pedagogy of writing to learn, to use writing to engage question-based, written inquiry. Our hope is that such inquiry will help students engage in critical reading and writing by asking genuine questions and use writing to pursue, with curiosity, those questions. We hope to form our next assessment question around the idea of writing to learn.
- The timeline suggests that, for our program assessment, we do another assessment sometime during 2018-9 school year. At that time, we will conduct a similar assessment to our earlier one and compare results. While we know the comparison would not be apples to apples (given that 83% of faculty are short-time), it could indicate whether and how the program has improved in its teaching of critical writing.

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