Form E-1-A for Boston College Core Curriculum

Department/Program: First-Year Writing Program

1)   Have formal learning outcomes for the department's Core courses been developed? What are they? (What specific sets of skills and knowledge does the department expect students completing its Core courses to have acquired?)

 By the successful completion of a semester of First-Year Writing, students will be able to demonstrate:

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

Writing 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
- Productively critique their own and others' works
- 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

Ability to Compose 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) **Where are these learning outcomes published? Be specific.** (Where are the department's expected learning outcomes for its Core courses accessible: on the web, in the catalog, or in your department handouts?)

The learning outcomes are published in multiple places, including on the First-Year Writing Seminar program page: [First-Year Writing Seminar & Literature Core - English - Boston College](). These outcomes are also accessible on individual FWS syllabi for students, as well as on our internal canvas onboarding site for all FWS instructors.

3) Other than GPA, what data/evidence is used to determine whether students have achieved the stated outcomes for the Core requirement? (What evidence and analytical approaches do you use to assess which of the student learning outcomes have been achieved more or less well?)

The FWS Program was in a year of transition in 2024-2025, as the directorship rotated from Paula Mathieu (who has been director for the last 14 years) to Jessica Pauszek who will be director for the next rotation.

The majority of FWS classes each year are taught by part time instructors and graduate teaching fellows. Because of this high turnover rate each year, we have a variety of methods to approach whether our learning outcomes are achieved and what steps we should take in moving forward. These steps begin with assessing how we teach the learning outcomes, then move to the products students produce.

1. **Syllabi Review.** Before the semester, syllabi are reviewed for all new graduate students and part time instructors by the Director of FWS (currently, Jessica Pauszek) to see if the

learning outcomes are clearly stated and can be met with the designed assignments. New graduate student instructors (called Teaching Fellows) also have their syllabi reviewed by their FWS mentor. For the 24-25 academic year, these mentors were Martha Hincks, Dacia Gentilella, Brian Zimmerman, and Amanda Labriola.

2. **Instructor Observations.** As a way of assessing whether teaching approaches in FWS line up with the learning outcomes, all new instructors of FWS are observed in their teaching by either the Director of Writing, the FWS mentors, the Assistant Chair (Rebekah Mitsein), or a faculty mentor. Each teaching fellow was observed 2-3 times throughout the year, and all new part time instructors are observed once. Other PTIs are observed periodically. After each observation, the instructor and observer had a conversation about the learning outcomes of the course and the teaching methods. This approach allowed observers to make suggestions for revision if any learning outcomes still needed to be addressed.

3. **Discussions about Student Examples.** Throughout the course of the year, the FWS Director, Associate Director, mentors, and teaching fellows had multiple conversations and reflections about learning outcomes through using student example papers. In these conversations, we would discuss how the learning objectives of a particular unit were being met or how they might be better achieved by revising part of the assignment or lesson plan. These conversations then helped us mentor Teaching Fellows about how to adjust their teaching during the semester as well as between Fall and Spring.

4) **Who interprets the evidence? What is the process?** (Who in the department is responsible for interpreting the data and making recommendations for curriculum or assignment changes if appropriate? When does this occur?)

This year, the Director of Writing, Associate Director, and FWS mentors were responsible for interpreting this information and making recommendations for curriculum and assignment changes. In addition to this group, the 2024-2025 curriculum for FWS was also revised through an FWS Faculty Seminar taught by Paula Mathieu, Jessica Pauszek, and Vincent Portillo in spring 2024. During this four week seminar, Mathieu, Pauszek, and Portillo collaborated to begin developing curriculum models that would guide FTF in teaching FWS. Based on this work, we revised these curriculum models and they were used by the Teaching Fellows in ENG 8825 (who will teach in 2025-2026). In other words, we have an ongoing and recursive process for curriculum revision, with the hopes of continuing to make FWS a cohesive experience across sections. We will continue this process into next year and make further revisions to the curriculum based on ongoing needs.

5) What were the assessment results and what changes have been made as a result of using this data/evidence? (What were the major assessment findings? Have there been any recent changes to your curriculum or program? How did the assessment data contribute to those changes?)

We have made a few key changes to our curriculum for next year in order to help the cohesiveness of the program as a whole. As stated, FWS instructors change frequently because MA students only teach for one year. Therefore, we have begun thinking about ways to make the FWS student and teacher experiences more cohesive. Some changes include:

1. We have created an **Associate Director of FWS** position that will be taken on by a graduate student each year. The goal with this is to create a professional development opportunity for a graduate student.
2. **FWS Onboarding Canvas Site.** Along with the Center for Design and Innovative Learning, Pauszek developed a pilot FWS Onboarding site. The onboarding site will allow the FWS Program to have all the onboarding information in one place for all instructors.
3. We also developed an **FWS Archive** through a program called AirTable, which can be used by all instructors who might want to see assignment ideas, student examples, and ideas for class design. This will continue to be expanded on as we revise the curriculum.
4. **Increasing the importance of Primary Research.** With the goal of further aligning FWS curriculum across the program, Pauszek coordinated with Burns and O'Neill Librarians to develop a series of modules focused on primary source analysis. These designed modules will enable FWS instructors to have resources for teaching students how to use and work with primary sources.
5. **Cohort models.** For the first time in ENG 8225, we used a cohort model to design FWS syllabi for next year with 20 Teaching Fellows. In other words, rather than have 20 students developing 3-4 assignments and final all that are different (amounting to ~60-80 individual assignments!), there are 5 cohorts. Everyone in those cohorts developed a syllabi (including assignments, calendar, readings, etc)., which was adapted from the pre-approved models. The goal with this change is to continue to make FWS classes across instructors cohere within the program.

6)   Date of the most recent program review. (Your latest comprehensive departmental self-study and external review.)

Our departmental self study is occurring this year, beginning in summer 2025 and continuing through the fall 2026 semester. The FWS program has not had an external review since 2011, which was conducted by the Council of Writing Program Administrators.