

*Revisiting Gateway: Issues and Recommendations*

Submitted by  
Frank Boyd  
Director of General Education

to

Academic Standards subcommittee of  
the Curriculum Council

Curtis Trout, Chair

In April of 2004, Acting Provost Roger Schnaitter and Acting Dean of the Faculty Tom Griffiths requested that an assessment of Gateway staffing issues be submitted to the Curriculum Council for review. To prepare for this report, I shared the ideas contained in this document with a number of constituencies. I met twice with the Council on University Policies and Procedures (CUPP) and numerous times with the Curriculum Council. To date, I have participated in three discussions with the informal committee of chairs and school directors. I've also discussed some of these issues a number of times with our senior academic administrators. Finally, I've had countless informal discussions with colleagues from across the IWU campus. The recommendations contained in this report have benefited immeasurably from these discussions, though some of my colleagues will be disappointed to find that this report does not contain all of their advice.

This report should be viewed as an extension of the work undertaken by the Gateway Assessment Task Force (GATF) two years ago. In its final report, the GATF outlined two sets of recommendations. First, the report suggested that the Curriculum Council explore a portfolio-style assessment of student writing. The Academic Standards (AS) subcommittee has crafted a draft portfolio proposal that is currently under discussion. The second recommendation of the GATF focused on problems with staffing. Those recommendations serve as a point of departure for the more detailed proposals outlined below.

The report proceeds as follows. The first section reviews the structure of the Gateway Colloquium. This discussion provides a condensed background on the issue, which should prove useful for the faculty who joined the IWU community after the General Education reforms of the early- to mid-1990s. The findings of the GATF and many of the subsequent discussions that inform this report highlight the structural problems of the Gateway Colloquium. This report will, by necessity, touch on both issues and strongly suggest that the resource issue cannot be meaningfully detached from broader issues of curricular design. Section II presents some concrete proposals, including suggestions for revising the Gateway curriculum and the process by which we staff it.

### **Structure of the Gateway Colloquium**

The Gateway Colloquium constituted just one part of a sweeping set of reforms that changed IWU's system of General Education, introduced May Term, and reduced the faculty's teaching load from seven to six courses per year. The faculty voted to formally adopt the new system in 1997, but work on the new program began in 1993 with the Summer Task

Force on Course Load Reduction. In between, the faculty created a Task Force for General Education Reform and, in 1995, an Ad Hoc General Education Council that formulated the plans for implemented the new system. Nearly every member of the IWU faculty actively participated in this revision of the curriculum. When reviewing the institutional record of this period, one cannot fail to be impressed with the work of our faculty colleagues.

With regard to student writing, the reforms dismantled the expository writing requirement and eliminated the Freshman Seminar, a small seminar-style writing course for honors students. Because it was taught by faculty from across campus, the Freshman Seminar was in many ways an important reference point in the shift to a writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) model. With the introduction of the Gateway Colloquium, IWU joined an ascendant trend among liberal arts institutions in the 1990s that required small, seminar-style writing courses of their first year students. It is worth noting that at the end of 2004 the curricular structure of the Gateway colloquium is nearly ten years old, but still compares favorably to the first-year writing courses of our peer and aspirant institutions. While a minority of institutions required such a course in the 1990s, nearly 65 percent of elite liberal arts institutions now have first-year seminars for their students. Table I lists the writing programs of the top 50 liberal arts institutions as ranked by the *U.S. News and World Report*.<sup>1</sup>

Table I

School	2004 USNWR* Rank	No Writing Required in FY	Required Composition Classes in FY	First- Year Seminar
Williams	1			
Amherst	2			Yes
Swarthmore	3			Yes
Pomona	4			Yes
Wellesley	4		Yes	Yes
Carleton	4			Yes
Middlebury	7			Yes
Davidson	7			Yes
Haverford	9		Yes	Yes
Bowdoin	10	Yes		
Wesleyan U	11	Yes		
Washington & Lee	12		Yes	
Claremont McKenna	12		Yes	
Vassar	14			Yes
Grinnell	15			Yes
Smith	15			Yes
Bryn Mawr	17			Yes
Colgate	17			Yes
Harvey Mudd	17			Yes
Colby	17		Yes	
Hamilton	21			Yes
Trinity	22		Yes	
Bates	23			Yes
Oberlin	24	Yes		
Macalester	25			Yes
Mount Holyoke	25			Yes
Bucknell	27			Yes
Colorado	27	Yes		
Holy Cross	27	Yes		
Bard	30		Yes	Yes
Lafayette	30		Yes	Yes
Kenyon	30	Yes		
Sewanee	33		Yes	Yes
Whitman	34			Yes
Scripps	34		Yes	Yes
Connecticut	34			
Union	37			Yes
Franklin & Marshall	38			Yes
Barnard	38		Yes	
Occidental	40			Yes
DePauw U	40		Yes	
Dickinson	42			Yes
Furman	42		Yes	
Skidmore	42		Yes	
Centre	45		Yes	
Gettysburg	45		Yes	Yes
Rhodes	45		Yes	
Sarah Lawrence	48	Yes		
Denison U	49		Yes	Yes
Agnes Scott	50		Yes	
Wabash	50		Yes	
Lawrence U	52			Yes
Illinois Wesleyan U	53			Yes
Willamette U	54			Yes
<b>Total</b>		<b>7</b>	<b>20**</b>	<b>33</b>

\*U.S. News and World Report

\*\*Note that 8/20 require composition and FYS

### *The “non-process” of Gateway Staffing*

Though the structure and pedagogy of our Gateway course adheres to the modal approach in the liberal arts, IWU utilizes an uncommon approach to staffing. Two principles have guided staffing from the earliest stages of its design. First, faculty assumed that the colloquia would be distributed across campus and, consistent with WAC pedagogy, be linked with additional Writing Intensive courses both in the student's major and in other elective or General Education courses. Second and more importantly, teaching in the program would be voluntary. The 1993 report from the Summer Task Force states this principle explicitly on page 26.<sup>2</sup> When subsequent documents reference the mechanism for staffing, they invariably state that faculty volunteers will teach Gateway.

But staffing a required course with volunteers requires attention to resources. Reports from faculty workgroups and task forces from this period nearly all cite concerns about resources and the Gateway Colloquium, beginning with the 1993 report and running through the report of the 2002 Gateway Assessment Task Force.<sup>3</sup> Earlier memoranda raised the issue as a concern, while later reports cited staffing resources as a constraint and/or problem. Despite the ubiquitous presence of the issue in workgroups, task forces, and faculty surveys, no language regarding staffing exists in any of the General Education program documents approved by the full faculty between 1994 when the Task Force for General Education began its work, and 1997, when the faculty approved the full program. There is one exception: to encourage the dispersion of offerings across campus, the faculty did adopt a restriction that forbids any single department from teaching more than 1/3 of the colloquia.

Staffing of the Gateway Colloquium, then, rests on a very basic assumption: each academic year 35+ faculty from across campus will choose to teach a first-year writing course instead of a course in their area of disciplinary expertise. Should faculty volunteers be insufficient, however, there exists no mechanism for deciding which departments should provide the additional colloquia. Given this incentive structure, it is not surprising that we suffered a serious shortfall in faculty volunteers in 1997, only the second year of the program's existence. Senior administrators were able to bridge the shortfall only after an intensive effort that included working with individual departments and the hiring of adjunct faculty to liberate tenure-line faculty to teach in the program. Ultimately, the senior administrators themselves also offered colloquia in order to obtain the requisite seats for the incoming first-year class.

To ease the resource pressures, the administration also has worked hard to create a stable staffing base for the program. Beginning in the mid 1990s, the Provost worked with CUPP to identify new and replacement faculty lines to support Gateway. In their proposals for new

and renewing lines, departments emphasized how the additional faculty members could devote one of their six courses to support the Gateway Program. As these faculty earn tenure, however, many are receiving course releases as they assume positions of leadership, e. g. committee chairs, departmental chairs, etc. Oftentimes, these faculty surrender their Gateway Colloquia rather than departmental offerings. The end result of this entire process is that between 1996-2004 faculty volunteered a sufficient number of Gateway Colloquia only once, in the Spring of 2002.

Many of my colleagues have heard me describe this structural aspect of Gateway as a problem of collective action. Social science theorists explain that a collective action dilemma arises when there is a public good (such as our Gateway Colloquium) that is needed by everyone, but suffers from underprovision. The "dilemma" arises when there exist no mechanisms, processes, or institutions that can address the problems of supply.<sup>4</sup> Our particular variant of the collective action dilemma arises every year because it is in each individual faculty member's interests – as well as the collective interests of departments – for other faculty to deliver the program. Why? Because if there are other faculty who teach Gateway, then the rest of us are free to engage in other faculty work: deliver our major's courses, support other General Education categories, etc.

The problem, then, is that there exist no positive, extrinsic rewards for faculty to teach in the program. In fact, there are significant benefits for faculty who choose *not* to teach a Gateway Colloquium and commensurate costs for those who consistently volunteer. These costs and benefits have been noted in surveys conducted by the Gateway Assessment Task Force in 2002 and in the Ad Hoc Committee Chairs' survey of April 2003.<sup>5</sup> Many of the open-ended questions asked by the GATF elicited references to intra- and inter-departmental inequities in staffing, with faculty stating that some departments supply an inordinate number of Gateway Colloquia. More than 80 percent of respondents in the Ad Hoc Committee Chairs' Group survey declared that Gateway "is problematic with regard to staffing or delivery problems."

Since the faculty have expressed no preferences on a staffing formula, we have, instead, developed an ad hoc "non-process." Each Spring, departments and schools submit their initial course schedules, which generally yield about 75 percent of the seats needed for the incoming class. The Director of General Education then contacts departments and schools who might volunteer additional colloquia. The Provost and/or the Associate Provost then work with individual department chairs and school directors to provide additional sections.

### *Implications of Gateway Staffing Structure*

The costs of our present system are significant, but hidden. By far, the most significant costs of this process fall on the relationship between our senior administrators and the faculty. Because departments/schools collectively fail to volunteer sufficient Gateway seats, administrators are drawn into bilateral discussions regarding Gateway staffing. In most cases, that requires detailed discussions of departmental offerings and changes that might liberate courses for Gateway. The Provost, Associate Provost, and Associate Dean do not initiate these discussions because of an innate desire to supervise the minutia of our course offerings. In the absence of an established process or procedure, these discussions are the only mechanism to resolve the staffing dilemma of Gateway. An unfortunate byproduct of this process is that faculty then accuse senior administrators of micromanaging their schedules and the offerings of individual departments. The tension engendered by this process has grown over time and affects not only our ability to staff Gateway, but erodes the political capital needed by faculty and administrators for work on other issues.

This process also has obvious implications for the Gateway curriculum. Problems with the curriculum are not addressed and go undocumented because there is little supervision of the program or assessment of the curriculum. The current and past Directors of General Education are loathe to engage in any meaningful oversight of Gateway for fear of exacerbating the staffing dilemma. To my knowledge, none of the four Directors of General Education have visited the classrooms of Gateway instructors. Since the departure of Brian Hatcher in the old position of "Gateway Coordinator," oversight has been relegated to the collection of course syllabi.

### **Moving Forward: recommendations for staffing and curricular revision**

Before outlining the elements of a revision of the Gateway Colloquium, I would like to quote a passage from the chair of the Ad Hoc General Education Council, Mark Hanson, in his memorandum to the faculty on October 1, 1997. The occasion was the final vote on the full plan for General Education.

While this is a very significant vote, it seems important to remind ourselves that we have actually voted on most aspects of the program through the various stages of its creation. And, because of the philosophical implications of creating a 'continuously evolving' plan for General Education, we should probably not characterize any vote as

a final vote. This vote does not imply in any way that elements of the program are set in stone and not subject to review without a major program overhaul initiative. The vote we ask you to take is 'final' only in the sense that it is the last in a series of votes in the creation of a basic program structure which we can continue to work with and continue to improve.

The suggested revisions outlined here are offered in the spirit of the original proposal from the Ad Hoc General Council. This section suggests a reform of the first-year writing curriculum that is consistent with the overall goals of our system of General Education, but will alter the incentives for teaching in our first-year writing program. Further, I outline the elements of a staffing process that will create less uncertainty than the ad hoc process that we currently employ.

#### *A Proposal for Curricular Reform*

The 2002 GATF Final Report proposed that the faculty explore a discipline-based first-year seminar (FYS). This report presents a second, revised iteration of that model, versions of which have been the topic of discussion in meetings of the Divisions of Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities, as well as the Committee of chairs and school directors. The proposed model is similar to the Gateway Colloquium and consistent with the central assumption of the WAC literature. Namely, the acquisition of writing skills is a dynamic process that takes place in courses distributed across the four years of a student's undergraduate education.

A FYS would differ in several significant ways from the Gateway Colloquium. First, the FYS would be housed in the departments rather than in a separate curricular category. The course would carry a FYS "flag" in the same way that other offerings carry the Writing Intensive Flag. By listing the seminars as a departmental offering, we stand to give the course an identity that Gateway has lacked. In fact, one of the enduring problems cited by assessment efforts is the lack of a shared understanding of the course among faculty and students.<sup>6</sup> This shift also harmonizes the supervisory role of faculty teaching maintained by Department Chairs and School Directors in every other context except for Gateway. Table II illustrates how half of the first-year seminars in the top liberal arts institutions are catalogued as departmental or program offerings, not separate listings.

Table II

School	2004 USNWR Rank	Housed in Disciplinary Major (Yes/No)	May Satisfy Other Requirement? (Yes/No)
Amherst	2	No	No
Swarthmore	3	Yes	Yes
Pomona	4	No	Yes
Wellesley	4	No	Yes
Carleton	4	Yes	Yes
Middlebury	7	No	Yes
Davidson	7	Yes	Yes
Haverford	9	Yes	Yes
Vassar	14	Yes	Yes
Grinnell	15	No	No
Smith	15	No	Yes
Bryn Mawr	17	No	No
Colgate	17	No	Yes
Harvey Mudd	17	No	No
Hamilton	21	Yes	Yes
Bates	23	Yes	Yes
Macalester	25	Yes	Yes
Mount Holyoke	25	Yes	Yes
Bucknell	27	Yes	Yes
Bard	30	No	No
Lafayette	30	No	No
Sewanee	33	Yes	Yes
Whitman	34	No	No
Scripps	34	No	No
Union	37	No	No
Franklin & Marshall	38	Yes	Yes
Occidental	40	No	No
Dickinson	42	No	No
Gettysburg	45	No	No
Denison U	49	No	Yes
Lawrence U	52	No	No
Illinois Wesleyan U	53	No	No
Willamette U	54	No	No

Yes 12/33

Yes 18/33

\*U.S. News and World Report

Second, the FYS could potentially carry additional credit for majors or other General Education requirements. There are a number of faculty who state that resource pressures serve as the primary impediment to offering a Gateway Colloquium. For many, teaching a first-year writing course requires relinquishing an offering in their department's minor or major sequence. These same faculty could offer a FYS that carried credit for the major in addition to satisfying the first-year writing requirement. Other departments or programs may choose to offer General Education credit for their FYS. In both cases, it is likely that some faculty will be willing to teach a first-year writing course that is more closely linked to their disciplinary expertise. Table II shows that nearly 65 percent of the top institutions allow additional credit for their first-year seminars.

To summarize, the essential elements of a First-Year Seminar are:<sup>7</sup>

- \*small classes with a maximum of 16 first-year students
- \*disciplinary/substantive focus
- \*emphasizes writing as a process and a tool for learning
- \*possible credit for major and/or other Gen Ed (need CC review)

The Curriculum Council should investigate the resource implications of an FYS, but I believe this proposal addresses the resource tensions cited by faculty between the General Education system and the majors. At worst, the proposal is resource-neutral. The seats that are currently committed to the Gateway Colloquium could be shifted into seats for a FYS. Moreover, additional General Education seats or seats in the majors would be added as instructors submitted their seminars for CC review. For example, some of our colleagues in the Humanities suggest that they could easily offer a FYS that carries AV credit, which is one of the more underserved General Education categories.

#### *Proposals for a Staffing Process*

My survey of first-year seminars in liberal arts institutions leads to two conclusions about the staffing process. First, there exist no first-year seminars that faculty staff through volunteerism without the addition of positive inducements to encourage faculty participation. A few programs that are nominally voluntary have incentives like those at Bryn Mawr, where faculty receive credit for teaching 1.5 courses for every first-year seminar that they teach. In the vast majority of institutions, however, the administration plays a central role through what might be called "coercive diplomacy." These processes can be ad hoc and are, ultimately, *sui generis*, but it is likely that the successful ones are based on a transparent and routinized process. Second, senior administrators in academic affairs play a key role in staffing of first-year writing programs. In every case that I have consulted, the Provost/Vice President of

Academic Affairs or other senior administrators occupy a central role in this process.

Given these two elements, it will be essential that faculty work closely with senior administrators on a staffing plan. Many of our colleagues in the committee of chairs and school directors are optimistic that a revision of the curriculum will encourage some additional faculty to teach a first-year writing course. Even with the improved incentive structure that might come with a FYS, however, we have no theoretical or empirical basis for believing that the program will not face another staffing shortfall in the future. Rather than approach this problem in an ad hoc manner, the faculty should think about how the process might be defined.

One approach would involve a staffing formula or algorithm. The committee of chairs and school directors *briefly* discussed the factors that should be included in a staffing algorithm, including (but not limited to): number of majors/faculty lines, training of faculty, contribution to other General Education requirements, faculty lines "dedicated" to teaching Gateway, etc. To my knowledge, there exist no faculty-derived staffing formulae among the leading liberal arts institutions. Hence, such an effort probably would require coordination and direction from the senior administrators. It is possible, I believe, to craft an algorithm, but the challenges of specifying such a formula are likely to be very costly.

An alternative model would concentrate on working with senior administrators and faculty colleagues on a consultation process for scheduling. A clearly defined consultative process would eliminate some of the uncertainty from scheduling and help harmonize the expectations of departments and schools with the expectations of administrators. Members of CC and CUPP could work with department chairs/school directors and administrators on a process that ensures the staffing of the first-year writing program, but eliminates some of the perceived problems of ad hoc consultations.

### **Conclusions**

This report suggests a two-pronged effort to revise our first-year writing course. First, the replacement of the Gateway Colloquium with a First-Year Seminar will alter significantly the incentives to teach in the program, while enhancing the supervision of the program. Conversations with my colleagues in the Social Sciences Division and the committee of chairs and school directors have convinced me that this revised course stands to close the gap between the courses that we need and the courses that faculty will volunteer.

Second, this report emphasizes that curricular revision will not be enough to address the staffing issues and further emphasizes the importance of establishing a consultative process for staffing. As

presented here, the outlines of that process are intentionally vague and must be defined jointly by the Provost, Department Chairs, and School Directors. Such a process will ensure that when, not if, there is a shortfall of faculty volunteers to teach the FYS, the senior administrators will not have to mount an ad hoc effort to secure additional staffing.

This is a propitious time to revisit the Gateway Colloquium. The committee of chairs and school directors, the Humanities Division, and the Social Sciences Division have all had discussions on the subject in recent weeks. The conversations in the committee of chairs and school directors have been particularly encouraging and productive and, I hope, point to a more active role for this important campus constituency. I encourage the Curriculum Council to actively seek input from these groups as it continues to work on our first-year writing program. The appointment of a short-term liaison to the Chairs Committee – as discussed in the Curriculum Council on November 22 – is an excellent first step.

The recommendations of this report are presented with a view to promote discussion in the Curriculum Council and other faculty venues. Without a doubt, your work and the work of our faculty colleagues will only improve on the basic proposals of this report. However, it is my hope that CC will not entertain any faculty proposal for curricular revision that does not also include a proposal for staffing. As noted above, there does not need to be a staffing formula or algorithm, but the faculty and administration need to define a consultative process that guarantees the staffing of this important course.

Appendix I:



Appendix I -  
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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Note that only seven institutions have no first-year writing requirement that is either a expository writing or a seminar that emphasizes writing as a tool for learning. It is also worth noting that 11 institutions require both a semester of expository writing and a FYS. The full data file for Tables I and II, which includes hyperlinks to the relevant university catalogue pages, is attached as Appendix I at the end of this report.

<sup>2</sup> See [[http://www.iwu.edu/melloncenter/pdf/proposal\\_1993.pdf](http://www.iwu.edu/melloncenter/pdf/proposal_1993.pdf)] for the full text of the 1993 report.

<sup>3</sup> The following provides leads to the reports of the 2002 Gateway Assessment Task Force [<http://www.iwu.edu/melloncenter/gatf/index.html>] and the reports of the General Education Reading Groups in 2000 and 2001

[[http://www.iwu.edu/melloncenter/directory/assessment/readers\\_reports/index.html](http://www.iwu.edu/melloncenter/directory/assessment/readers_reports/index.html)].

<sup>4</sup> For those of us interested in reliving their undergraduate classes in economics, sociology, and political science, the benchmark work is by Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and a Theory of Groups*. There are literally thousands of theoretical elaborations and empirical applications of his framework.

<sup>5</sup> Faculty can review the survey [[http://www.iwu.edu/melloncenter/pdf/gaft\\_survey.pdf](http://www.iwu.edu/melloncenter/pdf/gaft_survey.pdf)] and results [[http://www.iwu.edu/melloncenter/pdf/gatf\\_results.xlw](http://www.iwu.edu/melloncenter/pdf/gatf_results.xlw)] along with the GATF report. The Chairs' survey and report are available at

[[http://www.iwu.edu/melloncenter/pdf/chairs\\_survey.pdf](http://www.iwu.edu/melloncenter/pdf/chairs_survey.pdf)]

<sup>6</sup> The report of the Gateway Assessment Task Force cited this as a problem and alluded to the earlier findings of the 2001 General Education Readers Report.

<sup>7</sup> Colleagues from the GATF and the Chairs Committee will recognize these elements from earlier discussions.