

The Curriculum Council appointed the Gateway Assessment Task Force (GATF) in the Spring of 2002 with the charge of “designing and executing a comprehensive assessment of Gateway, and making recommendations to Academic Standards based on the results.” The GATF was instructed to assess Gateway as a whole, emphasizing the program’s primary goal of developing effective writing skills while not ignoring Gateway’s other roles such as fostering critical thinking and introducing students to the university intellectual culture. Academic Standards selected members of the committee from among the faculty and student body in the Spring of 2002, and the group began its work in the Summer of 2002. The group met regularly for the entire 2002-2003 academic year to plan and implement the assessment.

The appointment of the GATF grew out of the work of the General Education Reading Group, which used portfolios to assess the entire General Education program, including Gateway. The task force started its work by reviewing the literature on assessment in higher education and by reading additional research that focused specifically on the assessment of writing programs. The group also studied the campus’ previous assessment activities that relate to the General Education Program and Gateway. Taken together, these readings left the group with many examples for how to best assess Gateway and with an agenda of specific issues raised by our colleagues on the General Education Reading Groups.

One of the key concerns with the Gateway Program centered on the finding that there is “insufficient shared understanding of the parameters and goals of the Gateway Program.”¹ Each assessment effort -- beginning in 1996-97 -- reported that faculty and students perceive a lack of consistency among Gateway sections. As noted by Banta et al, one of the foundations of successful assessment is the development of “a clear public definition of what students should know and be able to do” (Banta, 1996 p. 18). The presumed lack of shared understanding among IWU faculty, then, provided the GATF with a significant barrier to effective assessment.

The task force also found little support in the assessment literature for evaluating student writing after one course. The literature on outcomes based assessment of writing programs indicates that assessment of learning outcomes after a single course very rarely produces measurable results. According to White (1984, p 256), “This type of assessment rarely produces a ‘gain score,’ since . . . only a narrow improvement can be expected as a result of a . . . short writing program” (such as Gateway). Without a clear set of shared goals and the probability of insignificant results, the group decided that outcomes-based assessment was unlikely to yield any significant results.

The task force agreed that we *could* assess the writing pedagogy of Gateway, which is an obvious determinant of student learning. To date, there had been no assessment of the pedagogy and writing assignments of Gateway faculty or an effort to document systematically the variation in faculty perceptions of the program’s goals. To address these questions, the GATF began gathering information from a variety of sources. The task force hosted a non-org to discuss faculty perceptions and concerns regarding Gateway. We followed this initial meeting by analyzing the available syllabi of Gateway Colloquia and coding the assignments and pedagogy reflected in them. The GATF then drafted two faculty surveys. The first survey added validity to the analysis of the syllabi by asking instructors a series of questions regarding their own courses. The

second survey assessed faculty perceptions regarding the goals of Gateway, particularly its strengths, weaknesses, and issues of staffing.

To augment these efforts, the Taskforce invited Carol Rutz, the writing program coordinator at Carleton College, to visit campus to consult with the GATF and other interested parties. While on campus, Professor Rutz met with Gateway instructors and interested faculty at a brown bag luncheon to discuss both IWU's writing program and the program at Carleton. Of specific assistance to the task force were two meetings with Professor Rutz to discuss the group's assessment efforts and preliminary findings from the analysis of course syllabi. The opportunity to receive consultation from Professor Rutz provided us with a renewed sense of mission and enthusiasm for the daunting task of assessing Gateway.

In the Spring of 2003, the Taskforce met with faculty colleagues who were involved in the original design and implementation of Gateway. This discussion provided much-needed context to the analysis of data from the two survey instruments and Gateway syllabi.

Through the completion of this assessment and thorough analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data gathered in the process, the taskforce recommends the following in this report:

- The implementation of a revised assessment practice that emphasizes the acquisition of writing skills over time and recognizes that students learn to write through the curriculum by way of linkages between Gateway, Writing Intensive Courses, and the writing assignments from other courses.
- The establishment of an agenda for further discussion with the faculty on the revision of Gateway with emphasis on establishing clear programmatic goals, staffing the program, and creating a structure for supporting and supervising quality writing pedagogy within the campus' writing program.
- The establishment of a summer workgroup to generate concrete proposals and an agenda for discussion with the broader faculty. This workgroup will consist of the current chairs of the Curriculum Council and Academic Standards, the incoming chairs of Academic Standards and the Curriculum Council, and will be chaired by the Director of General Education.

The following sections discuss these recommendations in more detail. Section II reviews the findings of the syllabi coding and the two faculty surveys. Section III provides the details of an assessment program for student writing. In Section IV, we outline some suggestions for revision of the Gateway Program itself, followed by conclusions and a brief agenda for action in Section V.

Section II – Gateway Pedagogy and Faculty Attitudes

In an attempt to understand how the current Gateway Colloquium is being taught, and how faculty perceive it to be working, the Task Force undertook three assessment activities. First, we coded the pedagogy and assignments from all available syllabi for the 1999-2000, 2000-2001, 2001-2002, and 2002-2003 academic years. To complement the coding of syllabi, we surveyed all Gateway instructors, asking them to self-report on

their own teaching of the course. Third, faculty were given the opportunity to express their opinions about multiple features of the program. In this section, we report on the results of these three instruments.

Gateway Pedagogy: Syllabi Coding and a Faculty Survey.

Several Gateway Task Force members reviewed syllabi collected by the Mellon Center for the types of information we might be able to gather on pedagogy. The Task Force as a whole then constructed a coding system for the syllabi that attempted to capture information on the following aspects of the colloquium that were important to know (all of these questions could be answered "yes," "no," or "can't tell"). These questions were meant to assess aspects of the course relevant to the goals of the course as listed in the faculty handbook.

1. Is a style handbook included as a required or recommended text?
2. Are library information sessions included in the course?
3. Are Writing Center Information Sessions included in the course?
4. Is there evidence of revision activities?
5. Are there descriptive standards for each formal assignment of letter grades?
6. Are there creative writing assignments?
7. Are there synthesis/expository/summary writing assignments?
8. Are there argumentative/thesis-driven writing assignments?
9. Is class participation graded?
10. Are drafts graded?
11. Does the course include informal writing assignments?
12. Does the course include oral presentations?
13. Does the course include collaborative writing assignments?

Faculty who had taught a Gateway also were sent a questionnaire asking them to self-report on the use of various aspects of their pedagogy. Questions 1-13 overlapped with the questions we asked in the coding of the syllabi (see 1-13 above). Three questions about pedagogy that were not possible to assess in the syllabi were also included (#s 14-16 below).

14. If you require revisions of papers, are drafts discussed in conferences with you?
15. If you require revisions of papers, are drafts peer-edited?
16. Does your course involve activities or assignments on grammar/mechanics/style?

Results of the first two assessments are presented in Table 1. For many items, the survey responses match the information obtained by the coding of the syllabi:

- majority of faculty require a style handbook (68% and 78%)
- include revisions of papers as part of their pedagogy (87% and 94%)
- include low amounts of creative writing (20% and 27%)
- expect and grade class participation (82% and 86%)
- do not grade oral presentations (26% and 33%)

- do not grade collaborative writing assignments (21% and 24%)

For the following practices, we found more support in the surveys than in the syllabi coding, probably because the syllabi simply did not comment on them:

- the use of descriptions of grading standards (35% versus 74%)
- the use of library (33% versus 71%)
- the use of the writing center information sessions (23% versus 49%)

From the items that were only included in the survey, faculty reported high levels of revision activities including graded drafts (82%), instructor-student conferences (73%), peer-editing (82%), and, finally, grammar, mechanics, and style assignments (78%). The Task Force was pleased for the most part with these results as they generally mesh with the current written goals of the Gateway.

However, the Task Force did note with some concern a major discrepancy between the survey and the syllabi: instructors REPORT that they assign synthetic/expository/summary writing and argumentative/thesis-driven assignments, but their syllabi do not confirm that practice. In some cases, the syllabi were not sufficiently clear on the nature of assignments. Other syllabi, we observed, emphasize “creative” writing assignments over critical ones.

Faculty Attitudes Survey.²

In order to assess the faculty's current opinion about various aspects of the Gateway Colloquium 7 years after its inclusion in the General Education Program, we sent out a survey to all full-time faculty. The Task Force received 55 responses including 37 faculty who have taught Gateway and 15 who have not.³ The results can be summarized as follows.

We asked faculty to indicate how well the Gateway program presently achieves each of its four stated goals on a scale of 1 to 5 (where "5" indicates the highest level of achievement). Faculty also ranked the goals (1 to 5 where "1" indicates the most important goal) in terms of the importance that should be placed on them. The results are as follows.

- a. introduce students to the process of intellectual inquiry and develop student's critical thinking skills
 - mean response for achieving this goal = 3.4
 - mean ranking of the importance of this goal = 1.9

- b. develop students' ability to evaluate competing ideas and experiences
 - mean response for achieving this goal = 3.3
 - mean ranking of the importance of this goal = 2.7

- c. develop students' skills in the conventions and structures of presenting knowledge in written academic and public discourse, and in strategies for effective revision
 - mean response for achieving this goal = 3.2
 - mean ranking of the importance of this goal = 1.9

d. engage students in learning activities that prepare them for academic life in the university

mean response for achieving this goal = 3.6

mean ranking of the importance of this goal = 3.1

Although these data suggest that Gateway succeeds in achieving its goals, they also reveal that there is room for improvement. With regard to the rankings, clearly goals "a" and "c" are ranked as more important than goals "b" and "d." Goals "a" and "c" would appear to have the goal of instruction in academic writing most embedded in them. The higher ranking of these goals coincides with the written responses to our surveys, which emphasized writing and critical thinking as the core of the Gateway course. We found that here may be confusion about goal number 4 and whether or not the term "learning activities" was ever meant to apply to activities other than writing and critical thinking. This is one finding that has led the committee to recommend that we revisit the goals to strengthen its focus on writing and critical thinking.

When comparing Gateway instructors against non-instructors, we found that instructors perceived higher levels of achievement on goals "a" and "d" than non-instructors. In addition, there was also a statistically significant difference between instructors and non-instructors in "a" and "d", with instructor's ranking "a" as a more important goal and "d" as a less important goal than non-instructors.⁴ (It is also interesting to note that many more instructors than non-instructors filled out the survey.)

Faculty were also asked whether or not they thought Gateway instructors tended to use similar assignments in the courses on a scale of 1 to 5 ("5" indicated a high level of congruence) and the mean response was 2.4 (n=42, range=1 to 5, standard deviation=1.1). In response to the related open-ended question on this topic, faculty stated that students frequently claim that assignments vary in terms of quantity and grading standards. There is no way to directly assess the validity or significance of this student perception, but some faculty worry that inconsistency indicates a dearth of writing and argumentative assignments in all sections.

A mean response of 2.9 (n=43, range=1 to 5, standard deviation = 1.6) was obtained on a question asking about whether the linkage of Gateway and First-Year Advising has supported the goals of Gateway ("5" indicates strongly supported). In the open-ended responses related to this question, faculty could see advantages and disadvantages to the linkage, and were fairly evenly split on whether this linkage was, on the whole, "good" or "bad." On the pro side, faculty claimed that the linkage provided a solid first year experience for students, with advising going very smoothly because of the contact with students in the course. On the con side, faculty thought that the intellectual climate of Gateway colloquia suffered when instructors also served as First-Year Advisers.

Faculty indicated that the development opportunities offered through the Mellon Center were fairly helpful. Instructors provided a mean response of 3.7 (range-1 to 5, standard deviation=1.1) on a scale from 1 to 5 ("5" indicates very helpful). In responses to open-ended questions, faculty stated that the intensive initial training provided in the early years was extremely helpful, with more recent individual sessions useful to greater and lesser degrees. Many faculty called for the return of grade-norming sessions.

Finally, we posed two open-ended questions about staffing of the Gateway. Departments and schools describe several processes for deciding which faculty members teach Gateway. Faculty stated that various rotation schedules were used: some departments define Gateway as part of a particular tenure-line's teaching; others report a more voluntary process. We also asked if there are any implications for consistency in staffing; that is, we found that the same Gateway instructors teach repeatedly. Faculty stated that both negative (e.g., burnout) and positive (e.g., improvement, experience) consequences seemed likely. However, this space was also used to vent frustration about inter- and intra-departmental inequities in staffing. Some faculty perceive that particular departments supply an inordinate share of the staffing for the Gateway program and, furthermore, there is little rotation among faculty within some department. Faculty perceived this staffing structure as leading to a "ghetto-izing" of the course and a defeat of the whole point of instituting a Writing Across the Curriculum program.

Table 1: Faculty Pedagogy as indicted in syllabi (N=84) and Gateway Instructor Surveys (N=55)

Question	yes		no	
	syllabi	surveys	syllabi	surveys
1. style handbook?	68	78	23	22
2. library sessions?	33	71	13	29
3. writing center sessions?	23	49	16	49
4. revision activities?	87	94	2	6
5. grading standards?	35	75	33	22
6. creative writing?	20	27	30	73
7. synthesis/expository writing?	50	93	7	6
8. argumentative writing?	52	100	7	0
9. graded class participation?	82	86	11	14
10. graded drafts?	30	82	38	18
11. informal writing?	86	67	4	33
12. oral presentations?	26	33	46	67
13. collaborative writing?	21	24	37	76
14. draft conferences w/instructor?	-	73	-	27
15. drafts peer edited?	-	82	-	18
16. drafts writing center advised?	-	53	-	47
17. grammar/mechanics/style activities	-	78	-	22

Note: Percentages don't always sum to 100 due to missing data.

Section III: A Revised Assessment Plan for Gateway Colloquium

Best Practices in writing assessment.

The GATF found two practices that will be essential to revising our assessment of writing at IWU. First, it is vital that IWU be clear as to what the goals are for student writing (i.e. what needs to be rated and compared). Standards and goals should be developed with participation of the Writing Coordinator and teachers who teach Gateway (and other writing intensive courses) to insure University-wide faculty acceptance and to promote implementation. Literature on assessment stresses that goals should precede most other considerations (White 268, Yancey 255). There is a problem as to what people mean by writing or writing skill, such that “even among writing teachers there is little agreement” (White 266).

It is our view that the present description of “Category Goals” and “Course Criteria” in the General Education Handbook is too vague. It is not at all clear that “written academic discourse” deserves any priority as a goal over “engaging students in learning activities” or “introducing students to the process of intellectual inquiry.” It would be much more useful to develop in place of the “Criteria” standards that can actually guide teachers in designing their courses in such a way as to insure that specific writing skills are addressed.

The second essential practice is the development of an assessment procedure that ensures the consistent evaluation of student writing by the assessment team. A major problem in the assessment of student writing is one of defining standards by which to judge student papers. “[W]ithout efforts to reach agreement on standards, all papers get all scores” (White 266). If IWU decides on portfolio assessment as a graduation requirement, the standards for evaluation will of course have to be worked out. In general there are holistic ratings and those divided into sub-skills, rated separately.

In one benchmark study, Haswell presented a comparison of impromptu essays (first year and third year compared for the same student) done both holistically and by sub-skills and got a high correlation in the ratings (as well as indications of definite improvement of writing skills). The holistic grade from 1-8 was based on a global assessment of ideas, support, organization, diction, sentences, and mechanics. In the sub-skill comparison of first and third year work, raters marked “little better, obviously better or greatly better” for the same categories (Haswell 112).⁵

The GATF did not have time to deliberate on the specifics of an assessment protocol, but instead concentrated on the structural features of a new assessment program. We understand, however, that consulting with peer institutions will be invaluable in the development of assessment protocols and procedures.

Assessment of writing should emphasize the acquisition of writing over time.

The GATF found that we put too much weight on Gateway as one course if we assume that it alone will bring student’s writing up to “college” level or improve student writing significantly. The literature on assessment shows clearly the need for longitudinal studies to assess improvement in writing skills throughout a student’s college career. Little or no improvement can be documented from beginning to end of a one semester course; even over one year’s time it is hard to document improvement in writing skills. “[O]nly a fairly narrow improvement can be expected as a result of a relatively short

writing program” (White, 256). Even one year does not appear to be a sufficient time for meaningful improvement: “ a simple pretest/posttest evaluation design, even using sophisticated question development and careful holistic scoring, normally yields no gain scores for groups across an academic year” (White, 266).

Rather than putting the burden of development of writing skills on one course, the literature advises assessment be tied to Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programs, which covers different disciplines and allow a longitudinal approach. The existing assessment orthodoxy advocates longitudinal study that compares the same student’s work over time as opposed to evaluations of a cross-section of a class. In his longitudinal study, Haswell found, “The difference between first-year and third-year essays was highly significant: [the latter] averaged one full point higher [on a five point scale] than their first year essays” (112).

We agree that a longitudinal approach is both the most informative and the most consistent with current composition studies. However, we feel that the pre- and post-essay model used by Haswell and others would be somewhat artificial, difficult to administer, and not well-suited to a small liberal arts institution. For these reasons we recommend portfolio assessment of IWU students. Visitor Carol Rutz, who directs the Writing Program at Carleton College, presented the Carleton Portfolio program convincingly as a model we might emulate. It puts the responsibility of collecting writing samples on the students and sets criteria for what kinds of writing should be represented. The Carleton model includes 5 writing samples for each student over the first two years of college (there were also 5 writing samples in the Haswell portfolio study, 22).

The Writing Portfolio: structure and function

Based on this research and group discussion, the Gateway Task Force recommends the following:

1. 3-5 writing samples from a student’s first four semesters, only one of which will be from the Gateway Colloquium. All will be from courses taken at IWU; all will be selected by the student to meet specific criteria, such as argument or thesis driven papers and evaluative papers. The Task Force is currently studying whether it is feasible for all students to collect three or more papers in this period of time and will present its findings in a forthcoming report.
2. We recommend that the portfolio be submitted at the end of the sophomore year and that it be a graduation requirement.⁶ This addresses the major problem faced by previous assessment groups: lack of student participation.
3. A faculty committee will read the portfolios during the summer. These faculty members will receive payment from the university for their work. The initial committee would benefit from the input of consultants in portfolio assessment and/or visits to campuses with similar programs.
4. The faculty committee will, based on the portfolio material received, develop a standard for a holistic assessment of student writing. This can serve also as a

means for developing, supporting, and enhancing the teaching of writing on campus.

5. Students whose portfolio does not receive a passing mark will receive instructions from the review committee on how to address the portfolio's deficiencies.

Section IV: Recommendations for the Gateway Colloquium

The GATF was not able to agree on a full range of reforms for the Gateway Colloquium, so we have divided our recommendation into two sections. The first section outlines our consensus recommendations, while the second section provides a number of further recommendations that we hope will inform a broader faculty discussion.

Consensus recommendations

Gateway Goals. The results from the coding of Gateway syllabi and from the faculty pedagogy survey indicate that faculty employ similar assignments and pedagogical techniques in their courses. In fact, we were surprised at the high level of congruence given that some faculty and students do not perceive that colloquia are [[roughly]] similar in their structure.⁷ There remains, however, a diversity of opinion regarding how the Gateway Colloquium is and should be organized. Students and faculty share this range of perceptions, which is undoubtedly grounded in differences among the courses themselves, but may also be a function of the way in which the Gateway Colloquium itself is defined.

The 2001 Report of the General Education Reading Group states, “We sense that there may be an insufficient shared understanding of the parameters and goals of the Gateway Program,” and adds that “the definition of the course may need further reflection.”⁸ The GATF believes that it would benefit the program to further emphasize the preeminence of the “writing” goal of the Gateway Colloquium, which reads:

develop students' skills in the conventions and structures of presenting knowledge in written academic and public discourse, and in strategies for effective revision.⁹

This recommendation not only reflects the original intent of the Gateway Colloquium, but also serves to harmonize the expectations of students and faculty. We also encourage the Director of General Education and the Coordinator of First Year Advising to review the information received by first year students to ensure that they fully understand the structure and function of the course and its place in the broader liberal arts curriculum.

Use of the Writing Center. The findings from the syllabi coding and the faculty pedagogy survey indicate that faculty do not frequently employ the resources of the Writing Center – only half report that they recommend and require tutorials at the writing center. It is possible that the Writing Center could make a more significant contribution

to the Gateway Colloquium and other writing classes. The GATF recommends that every Gateway instructor have *access* to a dedicated tutor for their course. Though we recognize that some faculty would not choose to integrate formally a tutor into their courses, it is also likely that many faculty members would be pleased to have a dedicated tutor from whom their students could get directed help with writing issues. Of course, to staff such a program the Writing Center will require additional resources for student wages and training. The GATF agrees, however, that the faculty and students will realize a significant return on this limited investment.

Supervision of Gateway Instructors. The GATF agrees that any supervision of Gateway instructors should be conducted by their normal supervisors. Currently, supervision Gateway faculty is nominally the responsibility of the Director of General Education, but there have been no systematic efforts at supervision since the Colloquium's inception. Many supervisors already perform this function as part of their routine annual reviews of faculty teaching. Consolidating the supervision of teaching in this way avoids the obvious problems with establishing multiple supervisors for faculty.

Resources to support Gateway. We recognize the fiscal climate in which our recommendations are issued. The following proposals, we believe, do not require additional fiscal outlays, but instead signal that Gateway will be given a higher priority in the allocation of existing resources.

The GATF encourages the Director of General Education, Coordinator of the Writing Center, and the Assistant Dean of the Faculty to begin a directed search for external funding to support the development of the Gateway Colloquium and to help link the Gateway with our Writing Intensive courses. In our examination of peer institutions, we found that the most successful efforts at curricular revision have, not surprisingly, been supported with substantial external funding.

In addition, the GATF recommends that some of Curriculum Development funds available to faculty be earmarked for new Gateway Colloquia. Recipients would agree to teach in the program for two or more years and also agree to participate in some of the development workshops offered during the academic year.

Further Proposals on Staffing

While the GATF was not able to agree on a plan for staffing of the colloquium, there was one point of consensus: the *faculty* must undertake a serious, substantive discussion of these issues. Current staffing practices have a direct effect on faculty training and development, which in turn have curricular implications for the colloquium.

Staffing has also become a source of discord between the faculty and the administration. Faculty cited the staffing of Gateway as a governance issue in multiple venues during the visit of the North Central Accreditation team. The issue was again raised multiple times in the two open meetings sponsored by the chairs of the major elected committees at the beginning of March. It seems that the staffing issue for

Gateway has become a lightning rod of sorts for faculty who have broader concerns regarding faculty governance.

The GATF believes that the staffing problem is primarily a structural one originating from the design of the colloquium itself. The original report from the Gateway Task Force included no guidelines for staffing since it was assumed that faculty from across the campus would rotate into and out of the course. There was a codicil that limited the number of colloquia that could be offered by the English Department, but there was no mechanism to provide for Gateway staffing in the event that an insufficient number of faculty volunteered to participate.

As a result, what has emerged is an annual “Rite of Spring” in which Departments and Schools submit their schedules, but fail to supply the number of Gateway Colloquia needed for the incoming first year class. At this initial stage of scheduling, faculty volunteers have fallen short of the total number needed to staff the program in five of the last six years. In response, the Provost works with the Associate Provost and the Assistant Dean of the Faculty to find departments who can offer additional sections of the seminar. In some years, the full complement of Gateway Colloquia have been secured only after all of the senior administrators have themselves offered a course.

The staffing of the Gateway represents a classic collective action dilemma. Departments and Schools are rightfully concerned with delivering the curriculum for their majors and with their other General Education offerings. Gateway, by default, occupies a lower priority in scheduling for chairs and directors, which leaves an insufficient number of faculty who are willing and able to offer a colloquium.

Proposals for faculty discussion. As noted in section 4.2, there was no consensus opinion on a staffing model, but our discussions coalesced around two proposals – an equitable staffing formula and a discipline-based writing seminar -- that should not be thought of as mutually distinct. In fact, elements from both could easily be combined in a number of different ways.

There was considerable support in the GATF for exploring a staffing formula for the Gateway Colloquium. A staffing formula would facilitate longer term curricular planning by department chairs/school directors and remove the uncertainty inherent in the present system. This staffing formula would include several essential elements. First, any staffing formula must be flexible enough to recognize the contingencies of staffing and scheduling, including faculty leaves, faculty sabbaticals, and other short-term curricular pressures faced by all programs at one time or another. One way to incorporate this flexibility is to think about staffing in three-year blocks or intervals.

Second, the GATF recognizes that any staffing formula must begin with the number of tenure line faculty, but it must also consider other essential elements of the faculty’s workload. Among these would be the number of majors (measured at the end of the sophomore year), the number of qualified faculty, and other commitments to the General Education. Some faculty do not focus on writing, per se, as the primary mode of scholarly discourse. Other colleagues may not feel comfortable teaching a first-year writing course because English is their second language

Finally, we believe that faculty – perhaps the portfolio assessment committee -- could best serve as administrators of this staffing formula.¹⁰ Senior administrators would be relieved of the staffing duties regarding this one course unless circumstances arose in

which the committee requested their participation. Ultimately, staffing of Gateway or a first year seminar would be the responsibility of the faculty.

Discipline-based First-Year Seminar. One of the many models of first-year courses among our peer institutions is a discipline-based writing seminar that is similar to our Gateway Colloquium in structure, but housed in departments. These courses draw on the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) literature that emphasizes how the acquisition of writing skills is best conceptualized as a dynamic process that takes place over time and “in the disciplines,” rather than in a single, entry-level course.¹¹ It is important to note that this course does not directly address staffing, but instead suggests that staffing would benefit from this non-trivial revision of the curriculum

The exact configuration of this type of course varies among the institutions that have chosen this model, but there are a number of common elements.¹² First, there is an emphasis on writing and revision. Second, the courses focus on developing critical thinking skills germane to the disciplines. Third and most critically, the course is included in a broader Writing Across the Curriculum program via the writing portfolio outlined in Section II. This linkage creates additional curricular opportunities that are part of a WAC program.

Taken alone, a discipline-based first-year writing seminar does not address the structural problems of a volunteer system, but this type of course could address staffing in a number of ways. First, it is possible that more faculty would be willing to teach a first-year writing course that is more closely linked to their training. The 2001 General Education Reader’s Report specifically cited the reticence of some faculty to teach outside of their disciplinary expertise. Some faculty who do not feel comfortable teaching a Gateway Colloquium might be more willing to teaching writing in a more familiar context.

Second, a discipline-based first-year seminar might address some of the resource pressures cited by faculty as impediments to participating in Gateway. While first year writing seminars wouldn’t contribute to the offerings for disciplinary majors, they might very well count for other General Education categories in the same way that current courses can receive a categorical credit and a “flag.” This is the practice at other institutions with a writing course of this type – see Carleton for an example.

V. An Agenda for Action

The GATF views our report as a point of departure for a campus-wide faculty discussion. We also understand that numerous aspects of our report require further research before beginning a substantive dialogue. To that end, we request that Academic Standards appoint a Gateway Summer Workgroup to review our findings and further explore the proposals detailed above. This workgroup should be chaired by the Director of General Education and consist of the current chairs of Curriculum Council and Academic Standards, the incoming chair of the Curriculum Council and Academic Standards.

The members of this workgroup should begin discussion of their more detailed proposals at the beginning of the 2003-2004 academic year. We believe that faculty discussions should begin in smaller groups such as divisions before any campus-wide

debate. Of course, it is the Curriculum Council that will be responsible for bringing any proposals to the full faculty.

¹ The report can be found on the IWU Mellon Center website at:

http://sun.iwue.du/melloncenter/directory/assessment/Readers'_Report_2001.htm

² The entire survey is attached as Appendix A.

³ Three faculty did not answer this question.

⁴ Note that some data are missing because individuals did not answer the question or did not indicate whether or not they had taught a Gateway and some did not answer this particular question. The differences noted between instructors and non-instructors is statistically significant.

⁵ As a sample of some objective ways of gauging improvement in student writing, we can look at the categories in Haswell's (114) study. Raters compared the following data in the first and third year essays: mean length of sentences in words; mean length of clause in words; percent of words in final free modifiers; percent of words in introduction; means of coordinated nominals per clause; percent of words in free modifiers; length of essay in words; percent of words nine or more letters.

⁶ Obviously, the details of this plan will require considerable work. For instance, requirements for transfer students need to be established.

⁷ The reports by the General Education Reading Group in 2000 and 2001 discuss these attitudes. These reports can be accessed at the Mellon Center website.

⁸ See page four of the report at:

http://sun.iwue.du/melloncenter/directory/assessment/Readers'_Report_2001.htm

⁹ The Gateway goals are found in the General Education handbook and in the Illinois Wesleyan University Catalogue.

¹⁰ The GATF did not have time to explore the composition of this committee, whether it would be appointed or elected, etc.

¹¹ Note the discussion and citations of some of this research in Section III.

¹² Descriptions of similar courses can be found at the relevant web pages at Kenyon, Carleton, and Williams.