Writing Intensive Courses (indicated as W courses in the schedule of classes) have been on the books for some time at Butler, and are a significant part of an undergraduate’s program of study. Normally taken in the third or fourth year of undergraduate study, W courses reinforce the student’s writing skills by bringing those skills to bear on material and resources in specific content area courses. Ideally, a student will identify and take a suitable W course within the major (indeed, some W courses are required with majors), but students have occasionally taken courses that satisfy the W require in ancillary areas (e.g. an academic minor). W courses are designed to incorporate formal and informal writing assignments, which carry a significant amount of the course grade’s “weight” (probably a minimum of 65-70 %), but this does not mean that other types of assignments (quizzes, tests, oral presentations) cannot be part of the curriculum (indeed, it is recommended that a variety of assignments be part of the classes).

How is a W-Course Defined?

W courses are characterized by the presence of the following criteria, which may be integrated into the course in a number of different ways depending upon the course and the instructor.

WRITING INTENSIVE COURSE CRITERIA

1. Students must be asked to write at least once a week.

These assignments may come in a variety of forms. The intent is to use writing to get students to make connections, synthesize material, take positions, respond to questions and, in essence, become active, responsible participants in learning. Some examples of this sort of writing include overnight and brief in-class writing, article summaries, source annotations, parts of larger assignments, and so on.

2. Some of the writing may be graded; some may be ungraded.

The instructor need not grade all these writing assignments. Instead, individual students might be asked to read their writing to the class or to read and comment on each other’s work. It is important to note here, though, that all writing should in some way be tied to credit for the class. Informal writing can receive a “check” or a single point that goes into the student’s participation grade, for example, or the informal writing itself can be allotted a certain number of points in the course grade. “Grading” here is meant to mean labor intensive evaluation. Indeed, informal writing can often be read, checked, perhaps given one overall comment (or none at all) and returned. All formal writing, however, should be evaluated using established course guidelines and parameters.
3. Some of the writing may be formal; some may be informal.

One of the objectives of WIC is to give students the experience of writing in the formal modes common to specific disciplines. But equally important in WIC should be writing as a way to learn. The informal writing that students might do in journals, response papers, and "freewriting" tests their understanding of the course material and helps them discover ideas they may not know they have until they actually objectify them on paper. Most experienced writers recognize that these informal, more private writings are central strategies in the process of developing more formal papers. Gradually, informal writings evolve into drafts of more formal prose. Formal writing is defined here as assignments that carry with them some notion of scope, completeness, and polish; they can take the form of professional scholarship or practical, job-specific sorts of writing tasks that would be completed by professionals in a chosen field. In addition, the course may be designed so that segments of a large assignment are completed in a sequence, so that the student will have a chance to review and revise portions before the major assignment is due.

4. Some of the writing may be done in class; some may be done outside class.

The instructor may assign "overnight writes" which ask students to address issues in their reading or issues to be brought up in class the following day. Short five-minute "writes" at the beginning of class help students to focus their thoughts and recall what they have read. Other, more lengthy, and formal assignments may build on the short "writes." Writing done in class is a wonderful way to get students focused on a daily agenda or reading. It can be as simple as making a list of “talking points” that students would like to raise, or as complex as a focused question on some aspect of the daily reading.

5. Some of the writing should involve instructor feedback and opportunities for revision.

A significant portion of the writing required for the course must be read by the instructor in some form and responded to early in the semester. Students should be given the opportunity to revise papers at various points in the semester. The purpose of this aspect of WIC is not only to give students the opportunity to see how well they are meeting your expectations but also to encourage intellectual dialogue between instructor and student. Your comments and questions in the margins ought to stimulate thinking and discussion. This is one of the most crucial components of W courses; revision needs to be built in to the course in a fashion that is obvious and relevant to formal assignments. Some ways to accomplish this include commenting upon portions of drafts of formal assignments (which are counted as informal writing), the use of informal writing to develop formal assignments, shorter papers
submitted early in the semester being used as the basis for a longer formal essay, and other possibilities.

It is important to note that a W-designation must be requested each time a course is taught (some courses exist as both W and non-W). Occasionally students will be in a class thinking that it is a W course only to find out that the course was not designated as such. Please check with your department head to assure that courses intended to be designated as W classes are indicated as such in the course schedule.

**Designing or Revising W-Courses**

Any new courses must go through the vetting process, which involves approval at both the department and institutional levels. Consulting with your department head and/or dean is the first step in the process of proposing new courses; existing departmental courses may be configured to fill interests and needs, and may only require some tweaking to meet W-course criteria. If a new course is needed, consult the Faculty Handbook ([http://www.butler.edu/media/597648/faculty%20handbook.pdf](http://www.butler.edu/media/597648/faculty%20handbook.pdf)) for university policies and the Core website ([http://www.butler.edu/core/for-faculty](http://www.butler.edu/core/for-faculty)). The Core website links to the course proposal form for Core classes (W courses are part of the Core). Deadlines for submission of new courses to the Core Curriculum Committee are November 1st and May 1st, and it is recommended that new courses be submitted sooner rather than later in the event revisions are needed. If a new W course is being proposed, then the faculty member should consult with both experienced colleagues in the department and with the Director of University Writing programs before submitting the course to any committees. In order to submit the course to the committee, the faculty member should have a full syllabus with all requisite materials prepared (be sure the aforementioned criteria have been met and to highlight how writing will be incorporated and graded).

Revising existing W courses is at the individual instructor’s discretion and interests. It is not a requirement, and should be driven only when it becomes readily apparent to the instructor that certain assignments or practices produce less than desirable results, or if new strategies and techniques come to the individual faculty member’s attention. Revisions should be undertaken in consultation with both colleagues and the Director of University Writing programs, but such revisions do not have to be approved by committees.

**Resources for Teachers of W-Courses**

Workshops on writing pedagogy are held throughout the year, and are scheduled in such a fashion that accommodates all daily teaching schedules. Topics for workshops are developed based on faculty needs and interests, but, given sufficient time, a workshop on any topic related to writing can be developed and offered. Workshops are open to any member of the Butler community, whether teaching W-courses or not. Workshops also change with the times, so just because you have attended a workshop on a specific topic once does not mean that new material won’t be part of ensuing workshops on the same topic.
The Director of University Writing Programs is available for individual or group consultation on any matters related to writing pedagogy, and is the person to contact with any questions about the teaching of writing, W-Courses, or writing issues beyond the First-Year sequence at Butler University. A web site for the WAC program is currently under construction and will provide sample materials, workshop schedules, links to professional organizations and resources, and other materials.

The Writer’s Studio (JH 304 http://www.butler.edu/writers-studio/) employs student peer tutors who can facilitate the writing process for all students. Appointments are appreciated, and students are encouraged to bring writing assignments or writing in process to appointments.

The WAC Clearinghouse web site (http://wac.colostate.edu/) is a comprehensive resource providing information for all teachers of W-Courses.