

# First Year Writing Annual Report AY 18/19

## Mission Statement

The mission of the First Year Writing (FYW) program is to provide all undergraduate students with process-based instruction in academic writing that will support their continued growth and development as writers and thinkers throughout their undergraduate education and beyond. Our two courses—“College Writing I,” and “College Writing II”—are designed to connect writing, intellectual inquiry, and learning across the contexts of school, work, relationships, and community.

The mission of the first-year writing program is supported by standardized criteria for assessment of student writing, written collaboratively by full-time faculty.

## Program Leadership

Caroline Dadas rotated in as FYW Director in the Fall of 2018 for a 3-year term. Jennifer Holly-Wells continues in her full-time staff role as Associate Director. Bonnie Dowd (CS faculty) serves as Assistant Director, and Laura Field (CS faculty) coordinates the day-to-day operations of the College Writing Workshop. The administrative team meets on a biweekly basis to collaboratively move the work of the program forward. Caroline Dadas also meets with the department chair on a weekly basis to discuss FYW matters, a routine that proves especially important in a department where all faculty regularly teach WRIT 105 and 106.

## Enrollment

A key highlight of our program is its size: the FYW program instructs nearly every undergraduate at the University. Student needs are diverse and significant across our demographic and drive program events, professional development, curricular initiatives, and staffing. Table 1 below outlines enrollment numbers for AY 18-19:

	105 sections	105 seats	105 used	% capacity used	106 sections	106 seats	106 used	% capacity used	Total sections	Total seats	Total used	Total Capacity Used
Summer 2018	10	190	127	66.8	5	95	76	80	15	285	203	71.2%
Fall 2018	163	3097	3103	100.2	26	494	501	101	189	3591	3604	100.3%
Spring 2019	17	323	323	100	135	2565	2500	98	152	2888	2823	97.70%

Table 1: AY 18-19 enrollment across First-Year Writing courses

## **Advising**

First-year students seek advisement for several issues, including: evaluation of courses taken at other universities; concern about an instructor; appeal of a plagiarism charge; grade grievances; and placement in writing courses. The FYW administration maintains office hours each week: the associate director is available on a standard professional staff schedule and the faculty director keeps weekly office hours and appointments by request of students and faculty. Both correspond with students via email to meet the demand. The program works regularly with the University conduct officer (Jerry Collins) to enforce University and program plagiarism policies, and partners with the Dean's office on grade appeal issues as needed. The program asks that students follow a process that involves meeting with the instructor before progressing through administrative appeals; most issues are resolved on the programmatic level and do not require Dean level involvement. The faculty director also works regularly with the Dean of Students office, Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), and the Director of the Disability Resource Center to address student needs.

The director meets frequently with faculty who ask for consultation on a variety of issues including curricular choices, responses to student drafts, student attendance issues, and other concerns. As the program undergoes a pilot of new curriculum for WRIT 105, the director expects this level of consultation to increase while faculty try out new curricular approaches.

The assistant director and department chair assume responsibility for review of transfer evaluations, consulting the director in more controversial cases, some of which require additional document collection and evaluation (syllabi and sample papers) and a few of which require an in-house essay assessment. Course waiver records are maintained in an online database designed to enable tracking and report-generation.

## **Curriculum**

The FYW program takes a process-based approach to writing instruction, with an emphasis on multiple drafts, peer review, and one-on-one conferencing. All courses end with students' submission of cumulative portfolios to demonstrate improvement over time. Students produce three major essays in each course, and all essays in each course undergo a three-draft process that includes peer and instructor feedback. Instructors choose among textbooks selected by faculty committee, but have the option of drawing on materials outside of the recommended texts (including increasingly the design of textbook-free, open-access courses) in consultation with the program director.

The FYW program offers two courses:

- WRIT 105, College Writing I: The first of two required general education writing courses, WRIT 105 takes a broad, interdisciplinary focus on academic argument and analytical writing.
- WRIT 106, College Writing II: The second of two required general education writing courses, ENWR 106 currently engages students in critical reading of texts while continuing the emphasis on academic argument and analytical writing. Experimentation with the thematic foci of the course to expand the course's interdisciplinary reach has continued since SP '17.

This spring, the FYW committee re-envisioned and wrote new curriculum for WRIT 105. Chaired by Caroline Dadas, the committee sees three interlocking factors as reasons for revision. Perhaps most pressing, the rate of WDF grades in the program has increased every semester (Fall WRIT 105) from 2012 to 2017 (with a slight decrease in 2018), and we view this trend as a sign that the program is not meeting students' needs as well as it could (see Figure A).

## WDF Rate in WRIT 105 (fall semesters)

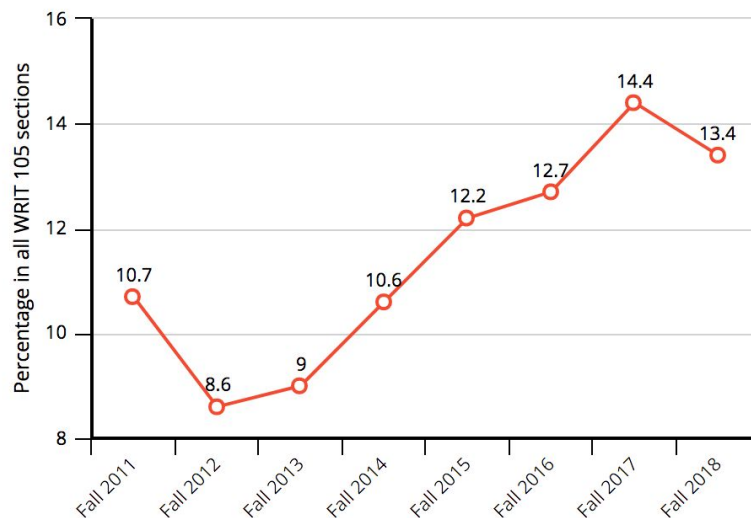


Figure A: The WDF rate in recent Fall WRIT 105 semesters

We believe the the program's mission includes meeting the needs of *all* students, not just those who arrive in our classrooms well-prepared. Relatedly, the WRIT 105

curriculum has not undergone a major revision in over a decade; as a new department, it is a kairotic moment to consider how our curriculum might be brought more in line with recent developments in the discipline. Considering that our department will now house a major in Public and Professional Writing, we also believe that FYW should be positioned as a potential launching off point for our major. Together, these factors call for curricular revisions that will allow us to be more responsive to our students' needs.

Over the course of the academic year, the committee reviewed curricula from around the country, assessing which assignments might meet the needs of our student population. The committee drafted a new model that privileged the following: (1) tapping into students' existing literacies (2) employing a scaffolded approach (3) rewarding students' drafting work in a more deliberate manner. A major difference between this new curriculum and the current one is that the new approach offers students the opportunity to write in different genres instead of the current model of three argumentative essays. The first module in the new curriculum is comprised of a literacy narrative, which is a popular genre in FYW programs around the country for its implicit argument that all students arrive at college with varied literacies. This assignment is used to help students make a smooth adjustment to college writing, given that it draws on a genre that many of them have written before (a narrative). This assignment, which can be viewed as an analysis of self, scaffolds toward the next module, an analysis of a text/issue. The purpose of this module is to develop students' analytical skills to help them prepare for the next module, in which they will have to make an extended written argument. This module will require the use of outside research; students will be encouraged to keep the same topic from the previous module so that they can build on their analysis of an issue to make an educated argument about it. Finally, students will end the semester with a portfolio assignment, which will consist of a reflective piece, as well as either a revision of a previous essay or a multimodal "remix" assignment in which they take a previous assignment and rework it in a different modality (video, audio, etc.), gearing it toward a new audience.

In sum, the FYW Committee sees the following advantages to the new curriculum:

- Additional opportunities for both flexibility and creativity for students and instructors
- Increased student choice in what they want to write about
- New approaches to meet students where they are at as writers
- Each assignment scaffolds toward the next assignment: analysis of self (literacy narrative)-----> analysis of another text----->using analysis to craft an argument
- Multimodal options are plentiful
- Consistent with common FYW curricula around the country

The new curriculum was approved by the departmental curriculum committee as a pilot option for instructors in the Summer 2019 term and AY19/20. The committee will review the results of the pilot next year and determine whether the new curriculum warrants wider implementation.

### **Delivery Formats**

Traditional First Year Writing courses offer a mixture of small group discussion, peer review, workshops, conferences, and in-class reading and writing. Traditional course models make up the bulk of the program's offerings. Like all first year writing courses, they are designed to advance the standard learning goals of the program.

Likewise, hybrid and online courses are oriented around the program's learning goals, requiring an additional 1,000-2,000 words of writing per week to account for having less time in the classroom. Students in hybrid sections are expected to engage in the online classroom environment regularly and therefore, although the course meets in person only one day per week, students have two class meetings in total per week. Similarly, students in online sections have class activities and assignments due twice a week. Approaches to hybrid and online instruction is informed by the work of a faculty hybrid committee. This past year the committee brainstormed ways to decrease the WDF rate in hybrid and online sections in particular; the committee has decided to pilot new approaches to attendance and participation in the fall semester and will work closely with the FYW director to determine the effectiveness of these new approaches.

4-credit sections of WRIT 105/106 offer an additional 50 minutes of instruction per week. Known as the "stretch" model of co-requisite writing instruction, this approach to teaching students who need additional practice with writing is nationally recognized as being effective with this student population. This model dictates that the curriculum remain the same as the 3-credit sections, and that the additional 50 minutes of classroom time (which take place in a computer lab) are spent by having students work on their ongoing writing projects while the instructor conferences with students and answers their questions. This added workshop time helps students keep pace with their peers in the 3-credit sections. Additional details on the 4-credit co-requisite model are described below in the section entitled "College Writing Workshop."

### **Program Assessment**

The FYW program maintains a rigorous agenda of program assessment. These assessments include routine faculty class observations, student evaluations, program

grade data reports by semester, and periodic surveys of faculty opinion on topics related to program materials (i.e. handbooks, textbooks) and their own classroom experiences (new teaching approaches, professional development needs, assessment of students' strengths and weaknesses outside of grade performance). The program also conducts assessments of any new curricular or programmatic initiatives as needed.

On the student level, as a program we track performance of our EOF (Educational Opportunity Fund) students, identify and target late-stage undergraduates in first-year writing (for example, we have offered sections of first-year writing exclusively for juniors/seniors) to move these students more effectively through the program, and periodically conduct performance assessments in relation to courses, our placement process, and other relevant needs as they arise.

Pertaining to the 4-credit courses, we surveyed both students and faculty in Spring 2019 so that we can refine our approaches in these sections; we will review this data in time to implement any needed changes for the Fall 2019 semester.

### **Grading**

Grading practices are a demanding priority area in a program of our size. The program philosophy around grading emphasizes and values revision, and faculty are expected to assign grades that are aligned with the program assessment criteria and grading benchmarks. The letter grades students receive at the end of the semester are predominantly reflective of the quality of their academic writing (85% worth), rather than other components of the course, such as participation, attendance, and the completion of low-stakes assignments.

The director requests grade data from the Office of Institutional Research at the close of each semester. This data indicates averages per course type across the program, as well as grade frequencies (As, Bs, Cs...) per instructor per course. The director uses this tool to discern trends within the program and to identify how we might shape future grade norming sessions (held every academic year, as well as during Professional Development Days). One particular area of continued research and attention is the increase in W/D/F grades in WRIT 105 over the past 5 years. This data has and will continue to inform curricular and professional development initiatives, including the College Writing Workshop program as well as professional development for faculty. We have found that when we are able to provide students with formalized and sustained supplemental instruction, failure rates decrease and grade performance is on par with program averages (see the "College Writing Workshop" section of this report below).

## Ongoing program initiatives

To promote a culture of writing, the FYW program maintains several ongoing initiatives that provide support and professional development for faculty:

- The Write Mode podcast: Produced in-house by Dayna Arcurio and Henry Margenau, this podcast focuses on pedagogy and scholarship, highlights faculty experiences, engages with initiatives around campus, and features scholars from other universities. All episodes can be found at: <https://thewritemodepodcast.podbean.com/>
- Deep Down in the Classroom blog: Started and maintained by Shil Sen, this project offers a way for instructors to share pedagogical ideas in a more informal setting. This year the blog has added interviews with faculty as well as a monthly FYW newsletter. The blog can be found at: <https://msufywblog.wordpress.com/>
- Faculty book club: A new initiative this year, the book club offers a space for faculty to discuss recent scholarship in Writing Studies. All meetings focused on pre-selected chapters from the edited collection, *Bad Ideas about Writing* (Ball and Lowe, eds.).
- Mentoring program: All new instructors in the program are paired with a more experienced teacher at the beginning of the year. Pairs are encouraged to meet during the course of the semester and problem-solve any issues that the new faculty member may be facing in the classroom.

## Professional Development Workshops

The FYW program offers regular professional development workshops each semester. Our offerings for both semesters are listed below. In addition, the program held Professional Development Days on May 20th and 22nd, 2019: full day workshops that allowed for more in-depth discussions around assessment, assignment design, and effective essay feedback.

### Fall 2018:

Evaluating student writing / Jennifer Holly-Wells

Thursday, September 27 / 1:00-2:15

Designing effective assignment sheets / Ron Brooks

Thursday, October 4 / 11:30-12:45

Evaluating student writing (prep for midterm review) / Laura Field

Wednesday, October 10 / 11:30-12:45

Feminism and composition (with GSWS) / Jess Restaino

Monday, October 15 / 11:30-12:45

Approaches to the portfolio / Melissa Adamo, Shelagh Patterson, Jackie Regan  
Tuesday, October 23 / 10:00-11:15

**Spring 2019:**

Unlimited revision approach / Shil Sen  
Thursday, February 7 / 1:00-2:15 / UN 2011

Visualization techniques for analyzing essays / Caroline Dadas  
Monday, February 25 / 2:30-3:45 / SBUS 225

Emotional support for students / Our colleagues from Counseling and Psychological  
Services & Disability Resource Center  
Thursday, March 28 / 1:00-2:15 / Schmitt 104

What can ESL / L2 learners teach us about good pedagogy? / Jamie Dritt  
Wednesday, April 3 / 11:30-12:45 / Schmitt 380

Book Club / *Bad Ideas About Writing* / Listserv discussion prompts

- Monday, Feb. 11 / online
- Wednesday, March 20 / online
- Tuesday, April 2 / online

**Professional Development Days (end of the year)**

Monday, May 20

9:30-10:00 Coffee and light breakfast options

10:00-11:30 Managing written essay feedback / Sommers article [Jen, Laura, Caroline]

11:30-12:30 Learning the literacy narrative genre [Caroline]

[12:30- 1:00 Lunch]

1:00 Meeting in committees / Ron and Caroline meet with summer teachers



1:45 Begin composing your own literacy narrative

2:15-3:00 Presentation from Katia Goldfarb, director of our Hispanic-serving institute, about the scholastic and cultural needs/challenges of our Hispanic population

HW: Finish your literacy narrative + bring one of your own assignment prompts

Wednesday, May 22

9:30-10:00 Coffee and light breakfast options

10:00-10:30 Debrief on the process of composing a literacy narrative [Caroline]

10:30-11:30 Grade norming session for the literacy narrative [Caroline and Ron]

11:30-12:30 Designing effective assignment prompts [Ron and Jaime Dritt]

[12:30- 1:00 Lunch]

1:00-1:30 Follow-up activity: revise one of your own assignments

1:30-3:00 Crowdsourcing ideas for writing-based activities that you have found helpful with our students

## **College Writing Workshop**

The term “College Writing Workshop” refers to both the 4-credit sections of FYW (WRIT 105 and 106) and to a tutoring space for one-on-one and group consultations, located in Schmitt 132. (Beginning next academic year, we will begin referring to the tutoring space as the College Writing Studio, to help avoid confusion). Both entities are discussed in this section. The 4-credit sections follow a “stretch” co-requisite model, which is a nationally-recognized method of writing instruction. This model dictates that with more time in class and with increased one-on-one instruction, struggling writers can make significant gains. In regular meetings during the year, 4-credit faculty meet and

discuss pedagogy, troubleshoot issues, compare experiences, and share best practices.

#### 4-credit sections

Students are placed into the 4-credit sections according to the Freshman Index Score (Fall) and a midterm placement process (Spring). For Fall 2018 courses, incoming first year students were placed in the 4-credit sections according to their Freshman Index Score, which is comprised of the following (per Admissions):

- Junior year English grade (25%)
- Algebra II grade (about 8%)
- Junior year History grade (about 11%)
- Rigor score (about 8%)
- GPA (about 63%)

Those students who earned scores of  $\leq 245$  were placed into the 4-credit sections, for a total of 511 students in Fall 2018.

For Spring 2019 courses, all WRIT105 students completed a self-assessment survey and a midterm review portfolio that responds to a standard program assignment. The self-assessment encouraged students to reflect on their writing experiences before registering for a spring semester class. The midterm review consisted of one final draft, one in-process draft, and a self-reflection piece. Instructors reviewed the submissions and made decisions about students who might benefit from additional instruction in a 4-credit course. Instructors then submitted student names to the Workshop coordinator, Laura Field, and the students were notified about their instructor's recommendation and directed to register for the 4-credit course. Along with notification from the program and individual instructors, FYW also collaborated with the advising centers in each college by sharing a 4-credit course description, schedule, and recommended/placed student names. Outreach from the program to the students continued through the registration period. 479 students were placed in the 4-credit classes in Sp19.



#### 4-credit Sections COLLEGE WRITING I

College Writing I (WRIT 105) is available in a 4-credit format for students who would benefit from additional class time devoted to writing. We recommend that students with a Freshman Index Score of 245 and below be placed in a 4-credit class. During 50 additional minutes of class time per week, students will gain targeted in-class writing support from their instructor in the form of small group / individual conferences and feedback. Through diverse instructional approaches, students and instructors will collaborate on all aspects of the writing process including idea generation, draft development, and editing.

For more information or questions, contact Caroline Dadas,  
Director of First Year Writing at [dadas@montclair.edu](mailto:dadas@montclair.edu)

The FYW program closely monitors the progress of students in the 4-credit sections. Data comparing the grade averages of students in WRIT 106 from the Spring semesters in 2017 and 2018 show that students who were recommended to take a 4-credit class and enrolled in a 4-credit section are outpacing those students who were recommended to take a

4-credit section but enrolled in a 3-credit section. As Table 2 shows, students who were recommended to take a 4-credit class and enrolled in a 4-credit section earned GPAs of 2.3 and 2.2 in these semesters, which is about a half a grade point difference from the average GPAs of all first time FYW students (2.6 and 2.8, respectively). By contrast, those students who were recommended to take a 4-credit section but enrolled in a 3-credit section earned GPAs of 1.5 and 1.6 on average during these semesters. This data indicates that the 4-credit classes, along with supplemental support in the Workshop tutoring space, are helping struggling writers to better keep pace with their peers. (The table below only measures first time FYW students).

	All FYW students	FYW students who placed into a 4-credit class and took a 4-credit class	FYW students who placed into a 4-credit class and took a 3-credit class
Sp 17	2.6	2.3	1.5
Sp 18	2.8	2.2	1.6

Table 2: WRIT 106 grade average by group

Given our program’s attention to the WDF rate across all FYW sections, we tracked the WDF rates of these same two groups of students: those students who were recommended to take a 4-credit class and enrolled in a 4-credit section, and those students who were recommended to take a 4-credit section but enrolled in a 3-credit section (Table 3). The former group ended up with WDF rates slightly higher than that of the regular population in both Spring 2017 and Spring 2018.

	All first time FYW students	First time FYW students who placed into a 4-credit class and took a 4-credit class	First time FYW students who placed into a 4-credit class and took a 3-credit class
Sp 17	13.9%	15.8%	50%
Sp 18	14.8%	19.8%	36.5%

Table 3: WRIT 106 WDF rate by group

Students who placed into the 4-credit sections and chose to take a 3-credit section, however, earned significantly higher WDF rates than those of the regular population (50% in Sp 17 and 36.5% in Sp 18). These high WDF percentages show that faculty are

recognizing that these students need further support through the midterm placement process, but when students opt out of the co-requisite model, they experience high rates of WDF grades.

Furthermore, the data show that students who took a 4-credit WRIT 105 class in Fall 2017 (labeled here as P4C4), earned a higher overall grade average (2.2) in Spring 2018 WRIT 106 than those who took a 3-credit class (labeled here as P4C3) during the same timeframe (1.6). Figure B also shows that the P4C3 students experience higher overall rates of WDF grades and lower overall rates of A and B grades.

SP18WRIT106 grades of FA17WRIT105 P4C4 students  
Overall grade average=2.2

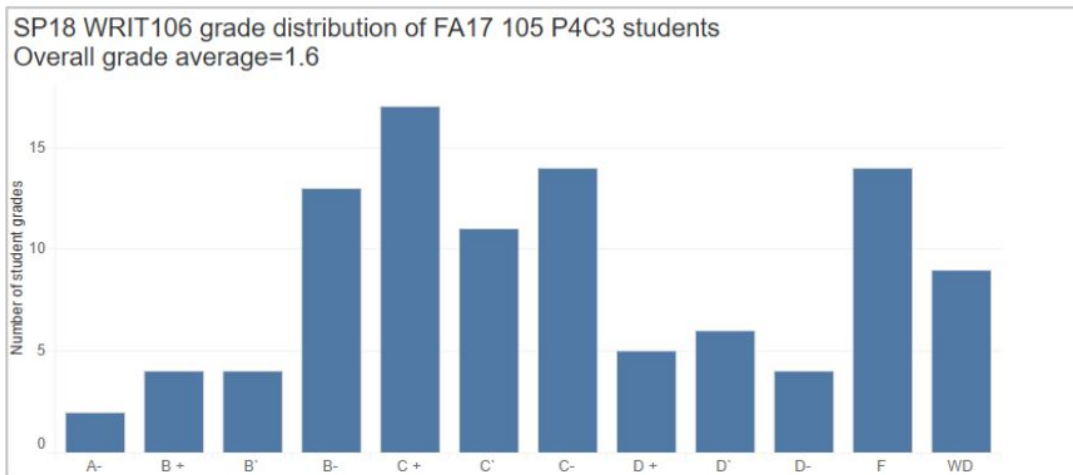


Figure B: SP 18 WRIT 106 performance of P4C4 students vs P4C3 students

We interpret this cumulative data to suggest that the co-requisite model and tutoring program are helping those students who take advantage of these offerings keep pace as college writers. At the same time, we are concerned about those students who opt

out of the 4-credit classes and do not utilize the tutoring program resource, as their overall grade performance suggests continued difficulty with effective writing.

### **Promotion of Workshop tutoring space**

Faculty are encouraged to include information about the Workshop in their syllabus, along with a link to the scheduling software (WC Online) in each Canvas section of WRIT 105 and WRIT 106. During the semester, Workshop coordinator Laura Field sends regular reminders to all FYW students that the Workshop is available for consultations. This past spring, Caroline Dadas shot and edited a short video (including



interviews with writing fellows and footage of tutoring in the Workshop space) to advertise the service to students: <https://youtu.be/7jA65Vn1Kuw>. Beginning next fall, this video will be distributed to all FYW instructors and they will be encouraged to show it to their students during the first week of class. This past academic year, the tutoring space saw 957 appointments; we are working to increase

that number next academic year.

### **Student Scheduling**

Students have a variety of options when scheduling time with Workshop tutors. The Workshop schedule will be distributed to all students by individual course instructors, shared with students in outreach emails, and published on the Writing Studies website. Students can schedule face-to-face or online tutoring sessions through WC Online. While drop-in hours are not posted, if a tutor is free when a student stops by, every effort is made to work with the student.

### **Student Writing Fellows**

Writing Fellows are recommended by Writing Studies faculty. Interested students submit a writing sample for review and are interviewed prior to hire. Some of the Writing Fellows are paid through a collaboration with the Academic Success Center, but they are hired by the Workshop. During the first weeks of the semester the writing fellows attend tutor training sessions. While the fellows' main responsibility is peer tutoring, they also assist with laptop loaning and weekly record keeping. When time and resources permit, the fellows visit FYW classrooms to introduce the Workshop and help facilitate writing workshops for students. In addition to the students who tutor in the workshop space, writing fellows are embedded in EOF WRIT 105 and WRIT 106 classes for

support during classes and weekly small group sessions. Writing Fellows are available for appointments 60-70 hours per week.

### **Special Allocation Graduate Assistant (GA)**

A special allocation GA from the Department of Linguistics, Jaime Dritt, provided focused support for students with English language learning (ELL) needs. In addition to serving in a tutoring capacity, Jaime also contributed to the training and assessment of Student Writing Fellows, helping to equip them with ELL-focused instructional skills. Jaime also conducted a workshop of Writing Studies faculty in the Spring (“What can ESL / L2 learners teach us about good pedagogy?”) and a workshop regarding assignment design during our year-end professional development days.

### **Moving forward:**

In respect to the co-requisite model, next academic year we will:

- Continue to offer 4-credit classes
- Explore whether to mandate enrollment in 4-credit classes when recommended
- Explore ways of getting additional support from Dean of Students’ office for at-risk students
- Evaluate the 4-credit WRIT105 in terms of its semester-long effects
- Evaluate the performance of students moving from 4-cr to 4-cr classes—we have some data from spring to fall, but the sample size is small

Report compiled by Caroline Dadas, Jennifer Holly-Wells, and Laura Field.