

First Year Writing Annual Report AY 20/21

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 program is supported by standardized criteria for assessment of student writing, written collaboratively by full-time faculty.

Program Leadership

Caroline Dadas is in the third year of a three year term. The administrative team (now director and associate director) meets on a regular basis to collaboratively move the work of the program forward. Caroline Dadas also meets with the department chair regularly 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 20-21:

	105 sections	105 seats	105 used	% capaci ty used	106 sections	106 seats	106 used	% capac ity used	Total sections	Total seats	Total used	Total Capa city Used
Summer 2020	13	247	233	94.30 %	7	133	130	97.70 %	20	380	363	95.50 %
Fall 2020	118	2950	2767	93.80 %	13	313	309	98.70 %	131	3263	3076	94.50 %
Winter 2021	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spring 2021	17	353	296	83.90 %	130	2806	2603	92.80 %	147	3159	2899	91.80 %

Table 1: AY 20-21 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 academic honesty 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.

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 approved by the program, and they 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, WRIT 106 currently engages students in critical reading of texts while continuing the emphasis on academic argument and analytical writing. This past year, we ran a pilot program for faculty interested in teaching a research-oriented focused WRIT 106; we will use the results of this pilot to determine if this is a viable option for the future.

The new WRIT 105 curriculum that was developed in AY 2018-2019 is an option for returning faculty to implement their classes; new adjunct faculty are required to follow this curriculum. A primary goal of this curriculum is to value and build on the literacies that students bring to FYW.

WDF Rate

One of the exigencies for this curricular change is the program's WDF rate, which we are actively trying to reduce. The past three years have seen this rate hold steady at 13-14%; we are hoping that further curricular development will support this goal.

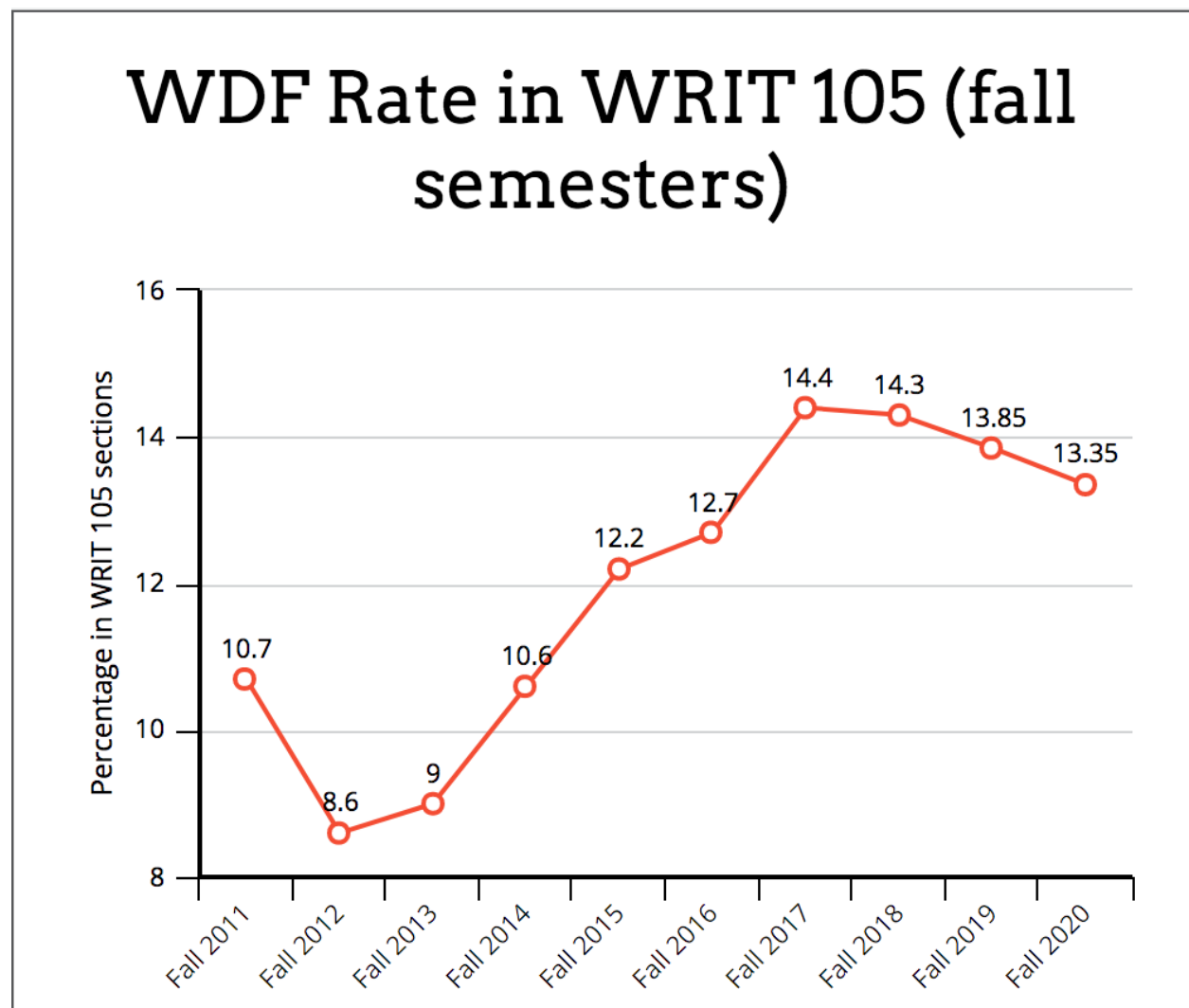


Figure A: The WDF rate in recent Fall WRIT 105 semesters

In addition to tracking the overall WDF numbers, we broke down the numbers by race and gender for Fall 2020:

	Overall	Black/African Amer. males	Hispanic males	White males
WRIT105	13.5%	26.2%	23.6%	11.5%

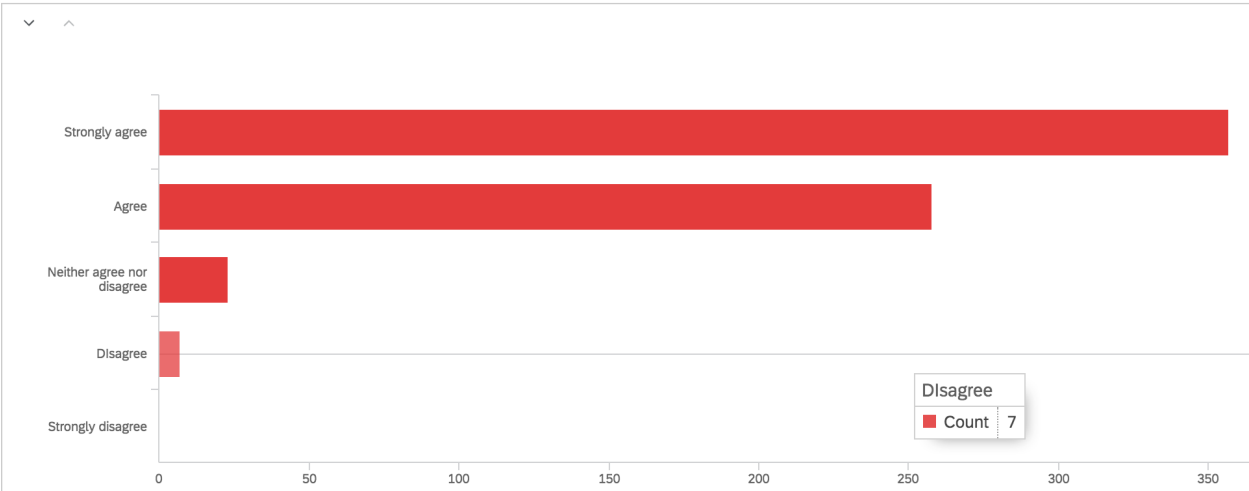
This data indicates to us that we need to be more proactive about supporting our Black and Hispanic male students. Toward that end, the program will be implementing a contract grading pilot next semester for interested faculty. Based on the work of Asao Inoue's anti-racist writing assessment, select sections will assess student writing based on the labor that students put into the class (number of pages written, projects completed, etc.). This approach has gained popularity nationally in recent years and is intended to combat racial disparities in assessment practices. We look forward to piloting this approach in Fall 2021.

Curricular change

In order to measure the effectiveness of our WRIT 105 pilot curriculum, the FYW program surveyed students (n=950) about their experiences in Fall 2020. Below is a summary of that data. Overall, students found this new approach to be engaging and useful for their growth as writers.

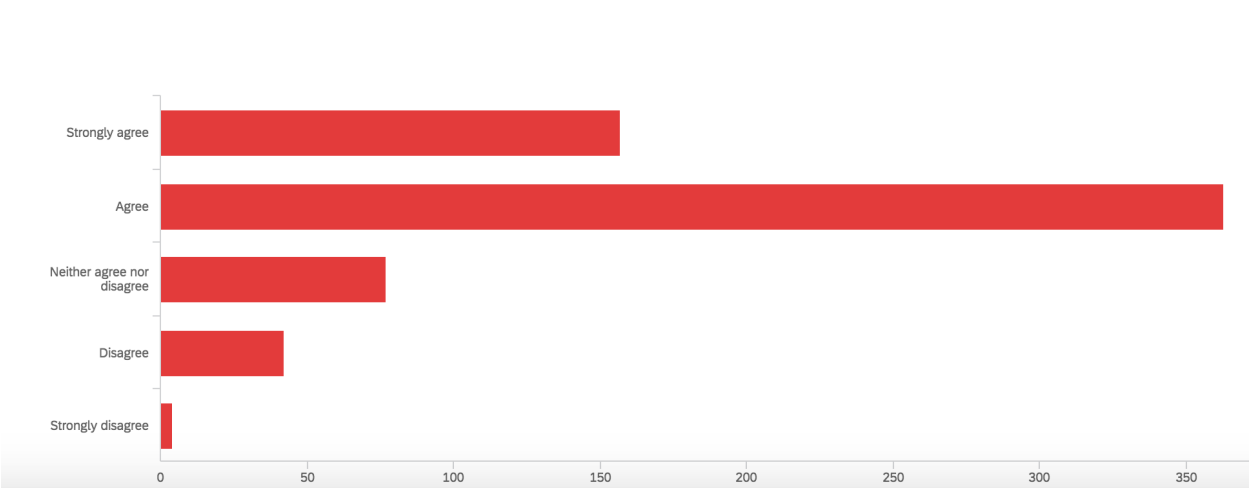
Q2 - The purpose of the narrative essay (essay 1) was clear.

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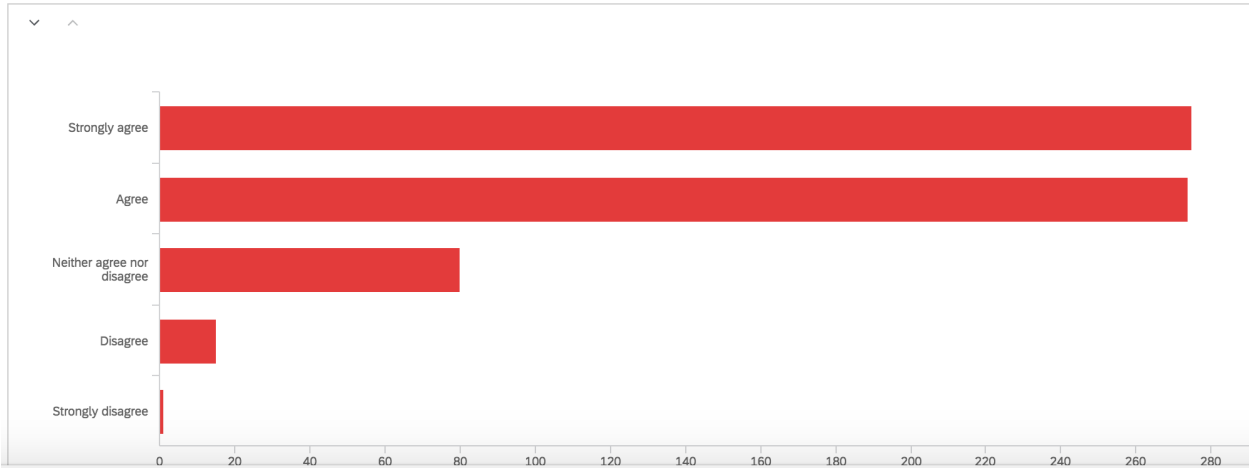
Q3 - The narrative essay was appropriately challenging.

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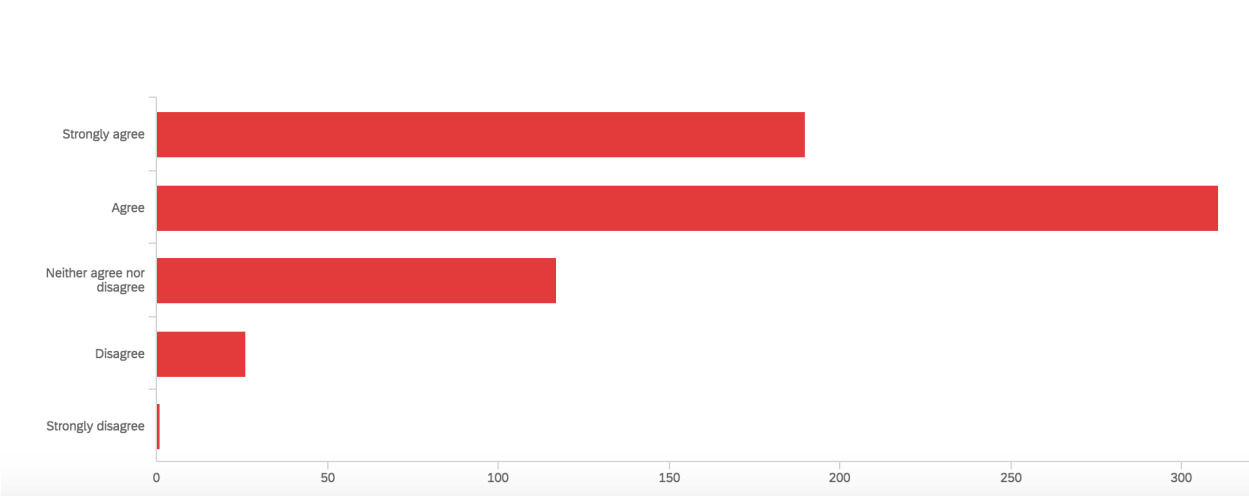
Q4 - I found the narrative essay to be helpful to my growth as a writer.

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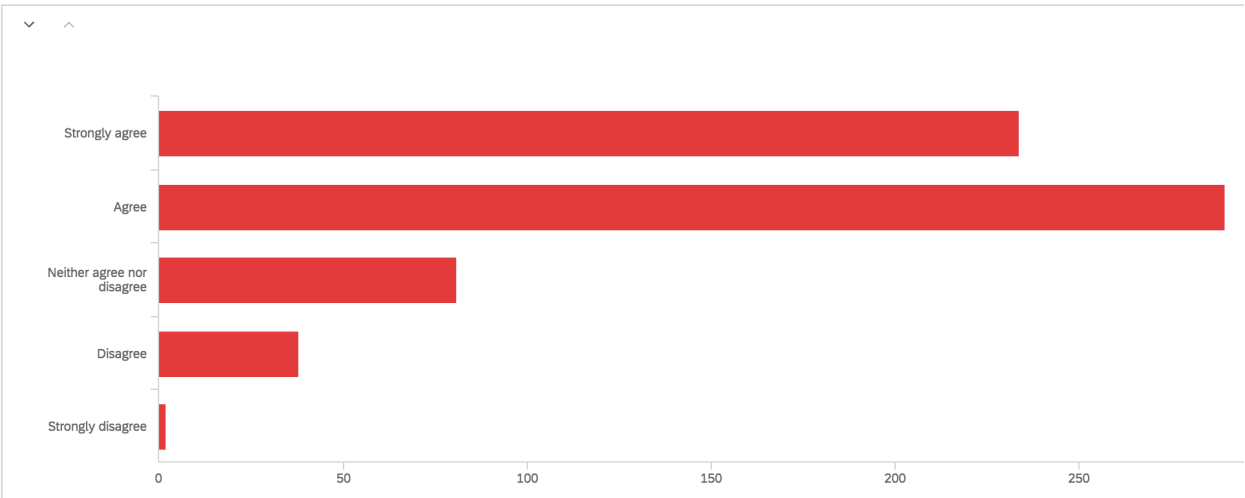
Q5 - I was able to use the skills I learned in the narrative when I wrote the analysis essay.

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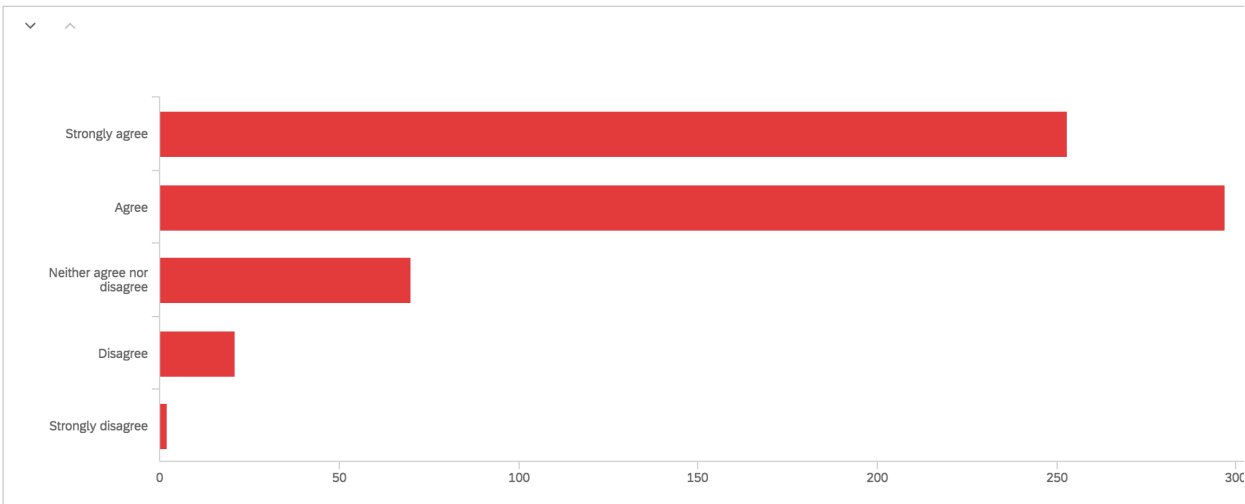
Q6 - The purpose of the analysis essay (essay 2) was clear.

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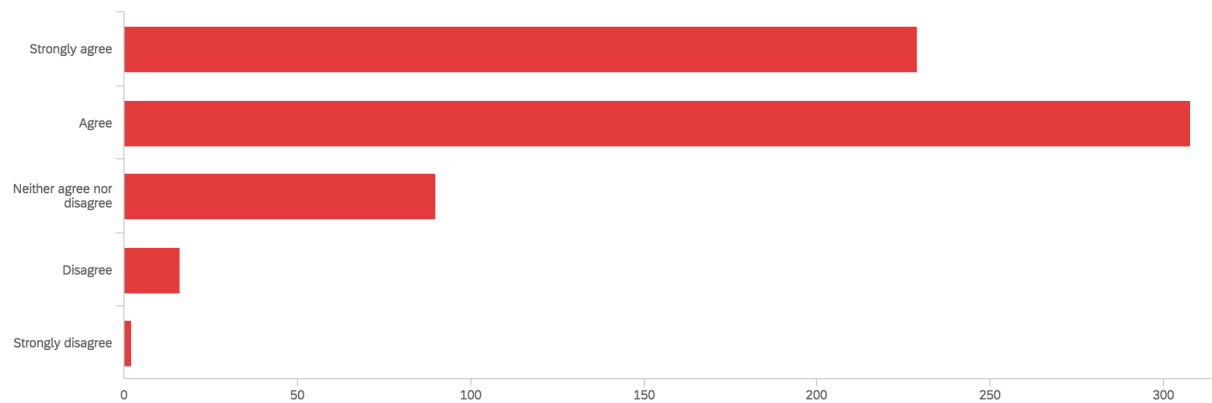
Q7 - The analysis essay was appropriately challenging.

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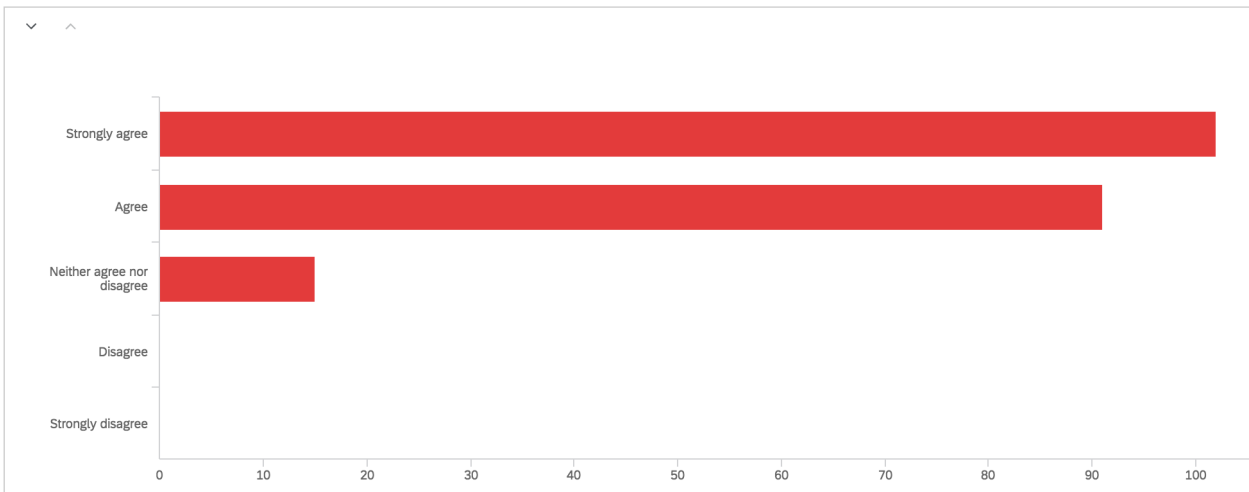
Q8 - I found the analysis essay to be helpful to my growth as a writer.

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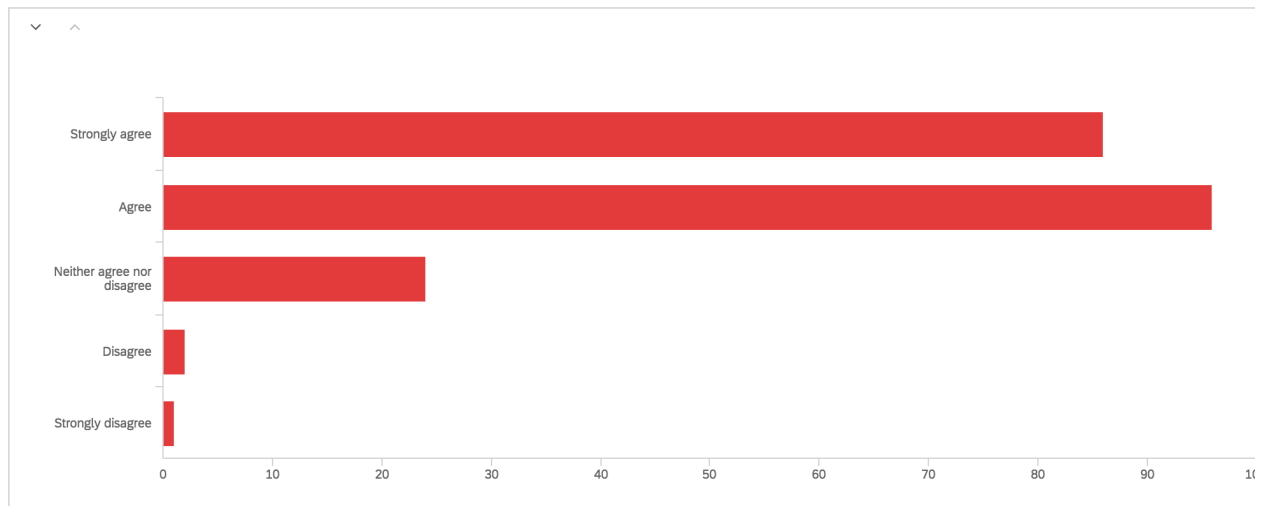
Q2 - The purpose of the research-based essay (essay 3) was clear.

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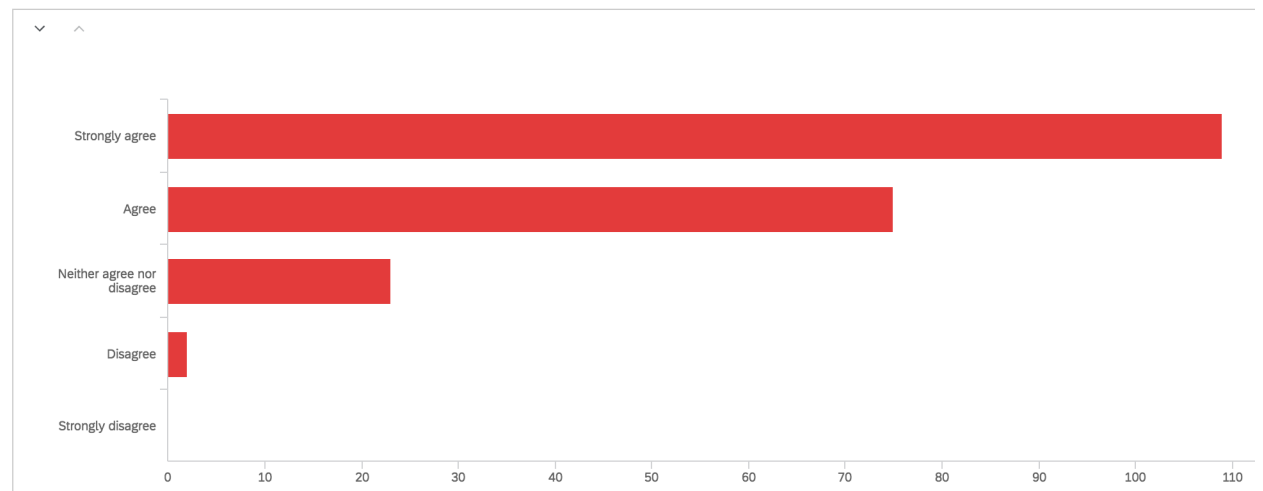
Q3 - The research-based essay was appropriately challenging.

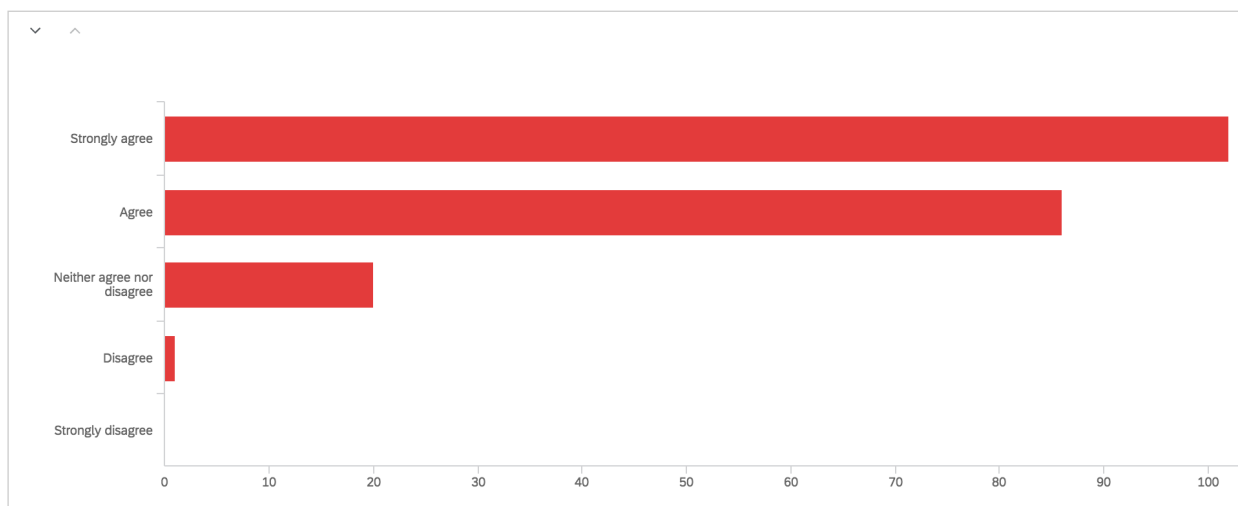
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Q4 - I found the research-based essay to be helpful to my growth as a writer.

Page





We will continue to seek out student input as we test new curricular approaches within the program.

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. Approaches to hybrid and online instruction is informed by the work of a faculty hybrid committee. This past year the committee piloted new approaches to attendance and participation in an effort at decreasing the high rate of WDF grades in these course sections. After reviewing the grade data from this fall and discussing the shift with the hybrid committee, we have decided to mandate new policies for online sections around attendance and participation.

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 “4-Credit Sections of FYW”

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. 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.

Ongoing program initiatives

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

- 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/>
- 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.

4-credit Sections of FYW

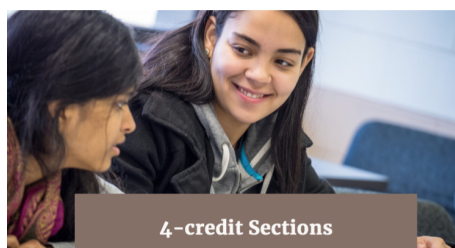
Our 4-credit sections of FYW follow a “stretch” co-requisite model, which is a nationally-recognized method of writing instruction. This model dictates that with more time in

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.

Students are placed into the 4-credit sections according to the Freshman Index Score (Fall) and a midterm placement process (Spring). For Fall 2020 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%)

Students who earned scores of ≤ 245 were placed into the 4-credit sections.



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 dadasc@montclair.edu

Moving forward:

During the upcoming school year, we will:

- Pilot a labor-based approach to assessment in select FYW sections and evaluate the pilot

- Refine our approach to giving feedback to students; an ad hoc committee is working on creating a handout that outlines best practices for all forms of feedback (written, video, student conferences, etc.)

*Report compiled by Caroline Dadas and Jennifer Holly-Wells.