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Aim & Scope Revision Proposal

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Proposal:

Decrease the number of words students must write and instructors must grade in English 1101 (12,000 words, approximately 40 pages) and English 1102 (9,000 words or 30 pages) to a minimum of 15 pages of formal papers and a minimum of 10 pages of informal writing in both classes.

Rationale:

Over the years, composition class enrollment, and thus instructor workload, has increased. In Spring 2012, a proposal to the administration reducing the seating cap of composition classes to 20 in accordance with the professional guidelines of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, was tabled. The current proposal addresses instructor workload not through seating caps but rather writing minimums.

The English 1101 Aim & Scope <http://www.gcsu.edu/writingcenter/english.htm> mandates that each English 1101 student write 40 pages in the course (12,000 words divided by 300 words per page equals 40 pages) and each English 1102 student write 30 pages (9,000 words divided by 300 words per pages equals 30 pages):

1101: Students may be expected to write six to eight essays (three to six pages in length) during the semester, one research project (about eight pages), and an amount of ungraded writing equivalent to about 25% of the writing total for the course.  These requirements equal about 12,000 words of student writing, including rough drafts and in-class work.

1102: Students are expected to write about six essays (three to six pages in length) during the semester, one researched essay (six to eight pages), and ungraded writing equal to about 25% of the writing total for the course.  These requirements equal about 9,000 words of student writing, including rough drafts and in-class work.

Instead, the new requirement for both 1101 and 1102 would read

Students are expected to write at least three formal essays totaling a minimum of 15 pages during the semester, one research project (a minimum of 6-8 pages), and a minimum of 10 pages of informal writing.

On a personal note, Alex Blazer has been a college composition instructor for 15 years and has thereby developed what he considers to be decent time management skills. However, he always breaks the six paper policy because he cannot find the time to grade six batches of formal papers in one course, i.e., a new paper every 2.5 weeks, *not including revisions*, while on a three/four teaching load. In his 1101 courses, he assigns approximately 40 pages of writing, but only four formal papers (as opposed to the expected six), three of which go through graded drafting and revision. In the proposed change, students would submit a new formal paper approximately every 5 weeks; with revisions of formal papers, students would be submitting a new paper or a revised paper every 2.5 weeks.

The Aim & Scope was adopted around 2000 when the average composition class size was 21. According to GCSU Records, in Fall 2000, there were 760 students in 36 sections of 1101, which meant an instructor graded 844 pages per section on average: 760 students divided by 36 sections equals 21.11 students per section times 40 pages per student equals 844.4 pages per section. In Fall 2011, there were 1019 students in 44 sections, which meant the average instructor graded 926 pages per section: 1019 students divided by 36 sections equals 23.16 students per section times 40 pages per student equals 926.4 pages per section. This is a 9.7% grading increase: 926.4 divided by 844.4 equals 1.097 minus 1 equals .097. When the Pounce partition came down on Wednesday, August 8, 2012, it was revealed that the new seating cap for composition classes is 24, which potentially means a 13.9% grading increase over 2000: 24 students per section times 40 pages per student equals 960 pages divided by 844.4 pages equals 1.137 minus 1 equals .139. Composition instructors cannot maintain rigorous grading standards while their class size increases and the mandatory word count remains the same. They need more flexibility in creating assignments for larger classes.

Over the last twelve years, staffing of composition has shifted from an approximately equal mix of tenure-line faculty and part-time lecturers to, as of academic year 2012-13:

4 tenure-line faculty members (Blazer, Melançon, Sirmans, Whitaker)

1 full-time faculty member (Beasley)

1 limited term faculty member (Lyda)

6 part-time lecturers (Brown, Holder, McClearen, Sollenberger, Tomko, Zipperer)

18 graduate student instructors (Adkins, Averett, Bohnhorst, Brogdon, Chamison, Dale, Hansen, Hardman, Henshey, Hoatlin, Lenz, Marr, Mitchell, Plunkett, Sandella, J. Stephens, S. Stephens, Wilkinson)

80% of composition instructors have no vote in the policies guiding their teaching. It is also probably the case that these instructors have not had a pay raise since 2000 as the GCSU faculty salary study did not include part-time lecturers and graduate student instructors. Voting faculty members owe it to our untenured and untenurable colleagues who serve the core for us to protect their labor. Moreover, we as a department owe it to our graduate students to set an example that composition instructors are more than “grading machines” and have some flexibility to assign more or less writing depending on how many students are in their classes. Finally, it is in all of our best interests to demonstrate to the administration that increased teaching work load results in decreased student education. In the ongoing spirit of assessment, our faculty will eventually invite all stakeholders (including part-time lecturers and graduate students) to completely revise the twelve-year-old guiding documents of composition, the University Profile System page, and the Aim & Scope. However, our overloaded instructors urgently need us to address this word count issue now.