

APAC SELF-STUDY

The College Writing Seminar

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## The CWS Program

### Actions and Goals for the CWS Program

In CWS, we teach writing as a process involving multiple stages of development and revision. We teach argumentative and analytical strategies. We provide individual and group feedback to writers and meet with each student individually in a conference at least twice per semester. We address rhetorical principles including audience analysis and rhetorical situation. We help students refine their critical thinking skills. We strive to develop students' abilities to read critically and analytically and respond thoughtfully to a variety of reading materials. We require that students learn to research effectively and efficiently. All students write papers that integrate research elements and require development of research skills.

CWS Lab helps students make a successful transition to the college environment and maximize their use of Juniata's resources. We hope to achieve a large slate of academic and social goals through CWS Lab.

Through the CWS Lab discussions, projects, and experiences, we want students to become better decision makers in and out of the classroom, realize that learning is not confined to the classroom, collaborate actively with faculty, staff, and peers, and develop understanding and respect for all people in our communities. We also encourage students to become active learners who participate in classroom discussions and presentations, attend study groups, and visit professors during office hours. CWS Lab reinforces the skills learned in CWS and helps students to develop innovative and creative research skills to become resourceful critical thinkers (see Appendix A – CWS Syllabus).

### Juniata College Mission Statement

Juniata College is a community dedicated to providing the highest quality liberal education. The aim of that education is to awaken students to the empowering richness of the mind and to enable them to lead fulfilling and useful lives.

As a community, Juniata is especially concerned with supplying the environment necessary to foster individual growth. It therefore values mutual support, the free exchange of diverse ideas, and the active pursuit of both cooperative and individual achievement. As a member of the international community, Juniata extends the student's academic experience into the world and encourages the free and open exchange of thought among peoples from distinct cultures and nations.

Individual growth first requires the development of basic intellectual skills: the ability to read with insight, to use language clearly and effectively, and to think analytically. A Juniata education helps students to understand the fundamental methods and purposes of academic inquiry and encourages them to achieve an informed appreciation of their cultural heritage. On this foundation, Juniata students are stimulated to exercise creativity and to develop those fundamental values-spiritual, moral and aesthetic-which give meaning and structure to life.

The qualities of mind and character nurtured within the Juniata community permit our students to realize their full potential as contributors to society, informed citizens, and caring and responsible adults.

### **Connection between Programmatic and College Goals**

CWS teaches the basic intellectual skills on which individual growth is founded: ***the ability to read with insight, to use language clearly and effectively, and to think analytically.*** We teach critical reading through a variety of source materials (essays, novels, writing guides, articles). We foster these skills through frequent in-class discussion and debate. CWS focuses extensively on writing with purpose and clarity, coherence and fluidity, organization and intent. A primary goal in CWS is to encourage students to think analytically while writing, speaking, and acting.

CWS also fosters individual growth through ***mutual support, the free exchange of diverse ideas, and the active pursuit of both cooperative and individual achievement.*** Students are challenged to think through underlying assumptions and search for truth by analyzing arguments and source materials. Students also participate freely in classroom discussions in CWS class and CWS lab. Students work cooperatively in writing workshops and in their CWS Lab project.

***As a member of the international community, Juniata extends the student's academic experience into the world and encourages the free and open exchange of thought among peoples from distinct cultures and nations.*** In CWS, students also discuss international issues, review opportunities for international study, and develop awareness of challenges that international students face on our rural campus. We strive to heighten students' sensitivity and awareness so that they become better global citizens and local neighbors.

### **History of CWS**

In 1996, we moved from teaching a two-semester freshman composition program to a one-semester College Writing Seminar. The original course included three segments: CWS Class (RW), Extended Orientation (EO), and Information Access (IA). After thirteen years of continuous refinement, the current form of CWS includes the CWS Class and CWS Lab (formerly EO). Information Access continues to be required for all freshmen but is no longer integrated into the CWS program. CWS Lab now has more academic components but retains its primary function as a "transition to college" experience. The CWS class is a portfolio-based course that concentrates on developing student writing, reading and critical thinking.

## **Present State of the CWS Program**

### **CWS Faculty**

The College Writing Seminar is taught by fourteen faculty and staff members. Additionally, we have five adjunct instructors. This is a typical distribution for CWS staff. Every member of the English department

teaches CWS along with one History professor. Recruiting staff from other departments continues to be problematic.

In 2009, we finally achieved the goal of a one-CWS-per-English-professor workload. Additionally, no adjunct instructor is teaching more than two classes. This is a significant achievement. This is a 4-credit writing intensive course with multiple revisions per paper and two required conference meetings per student. This course is time-consuming and demanding to teach. Reducing the course load increases the likelihood that students will receive excellent instruction.

### **CWS Requirement**

All incoming freshmen are required to take CWS. Few transfers from other institutions are allowed for this fundamental course. By requiring all students to take this class, we are assured of a baseline start for Juniata matriculates.

### **CWS Class Size**

CWS class size remains limited at a top enrollment of 18 students per section. Year-long CWS is capped at 15 students per section. Typically, our enrollment falls slightly below this size due to staffing/enrollment management. In 2009, our overall class size was 15 students per section.

### **CWS Lab**

CWS Lab meets one hour per week in the evenings. CWS Lab Leaders are selected and trained during the previous spring semester and are typically upperclassmen who are motivated to help first year students with their transition to college. CWS Lab requirements include attending cultural events, journal writing, a primary lab project, and ongoing experiential activities. The CWS faculty determine the scope of the lab project, provide support to their Lab Leaders, and evaluate all materials submitted in the portfolio.

### **Assessment Methodology**

In 2003, we first required students to write a timed intake essay under controlled circumstances. We also required students to write an exit essay. We collected these essays for three years and in 2006 Judy Katz used these essays as a basis for developing a one-year version of the College Writing Seminar aimed at first year students who demonstrated anxiety in writing, had poor preparation, and low SAT scores.

In 2007, we decided to compare the results of our timed intake essays with the exit essays. Carol Peters assembled a team of Writing Center tutors, Secondary Education majors, and English majors. She trained these students over several sessions to achieve a group norm of evaluation. After completing the evaluation, the results were troubling and indicated that CWS students had not improved during sixteen weeks of instruction.

Since we found this result confusing, we evaluated our methodology. In the intake essay, students were required to write at a particular time under close supervision. They were told that the results of their essay could impact their placement in CWS. As a result, the level of investment in the process was high.

For the exit essay, students were asked to write during a CWS Lab. While Lab is academic in nature, students are rarely asked to sit and write during Lab. Students had no real investment in this exit essay because it was just a task they needed to perform. Students knew it would not impact their placement or their grade. We surmised that student performance was compromised by the students' lack of investment and the less controlled environment.

Perhaps most importantly, we also realized that we were evaluating what we do not teach. In CWS, we teach writing as a process that results in a well-revised product. We do not teach timed in-class writing. So our evaluation method was inappropriate.

In 2008, we decided to modify our approach. In the fall, we asked all professors to collect and keep student portfolios at the end of the semester. We then randomly selected 20% of the portfolios from all sections. Student workers copied first and third essays from these portfolios and eliminated any markings by the professors. By comparing first and third essays where students were equally motivated to perform throughout the semester, we felt that we would have more valid results.

In Spring 2009, we trained a group of students on an 11-point rubric using a 6-point scale where 6 = superior performance and 1 = deeply deficient performance. The rubric focusing on the following key elements of teaching writing in CWS:

Audience Awareness	Organization	Development
Focus	Paragraphing	Integration of Sources
Voice & Style	Sentence Structure	Appropriate Citation Format
	Word Choice	Mechanics

We practiced evaluation using this tool until we achieved a general group consensus of the norms. The student coders then evaluated the essays.

### **Assessment Results**

Our results were satisfactory. Students showed improvement across all categories – modest but consistent. Several categories showed statistically significant improvement (T test showed these elements were significant at the .05 level or better).

**Audience Analysis:** Students typically do not consider audience when writing. Though they are adept at modifying their messages interpersonally, they tend to write the same way for all academic assignments. We focus on developing awareness of the parameters of the reading audience. We design assignments that feature different types of writing and different types of audiences. Students strategize

how to produce analytical and argumentative writing appropriate to the designated audience. In Audience Analysis, students demonstrated a minimal improvement of less than 1%.

**Focus:** Students typically write a broad response to any question. They lack clarity in their thinking and which is reflected in their writing. We teach students that being more precise in focus allows for a more in-depth analysis. We teach students to critically evaluate their own responses throughout the process of essay writing. We teach students to produce a clear thesis that directs the reader's attention and highlights the most important things the writer wants to stress. A clear focus is reflected in coherence in purpose and delivery. **In Focus, students demonstrated a statistically significant improvement of 3.2%.**

**Voice & Style:** Students frequently think that using polysyllabic language makes for strong writing. They also seem reluctant to stray from the comfort of pre-approved syntax and vocabulary. This makes their writing dull. We encourage writers to develop a unique academic voice by giving them opportunities to write beyond high school parameters. We read and critically analyze writers with distinct voices and writers who have an identifiable style. By analyzing what makes these writers work well, we are able to reinforce in our students that stylistic impact has tremendous value. **In Voice & Style, students demonstrated a statistically significant improvement of 3.3%.**

**Organization:** Students often write jumbled drafts. Many students allow minimal time for revision and their typical essays reflect the order in which their ideas occurred to them. We teach students how to evaluate and improve the structure of their essays to allow for a smoother, more coherent flow from point to point. We discuss ordering of ideas, outlining, transitioning, and editing for optimal impact on the reader. In Organization, students demonstrated minimal improvement of less than 1%.

**Paragraphing:** Students often do not know when to divide their ideas and often write with a bloated 5-paragraph essay format. We teach students to identify one primary idea per paragraph and to determine when the planks of their argument or analysis require more than one paragraph. We work to improve on their paragraph structure by analyzing others' work and evaluating what makes a coherent thought. We also teach students about paragraph structure by discussing topic sentences, ordering ideas within the paragraph, and exiting the paragraph with a strong impact and a facilitated transition. **In Paragraphing, students demonstrated statistically significant improvement of 3.5%.**

**Sentence Structure:** Students typically demonstrate basic understanding of sentence structure but lack much sophistication. Some students do not accurately edit for sentence fragments or run-ons. We work to improve sentence structure by detailing differences in sentences that work well and sentences that fail to work at all. We try to move students from accidental sentence structure to intentional sentence structure. We work on sentence structure through classwork, feedback on papers, and one-on-one conference sessions. **In Sentence Structure, students demonstrated an improvement of 2%.**

**Word Choice:** Students rarely choose the best language. Students use words by default and do not chose words for their impact. We try to improve students' awareness of language by evaluating language use in essays and novels. We teach students to select language with intent and in response to the designated audience. We help students to evaluate language for secondary messages and to steer

clear of inflammatory or insulting word choice. **In Word Choice, students demonstrated an improvement of 2.3%.**

**Development:** Students often do not know how to develop their ideas and have trouble differentiating the key components of their essays. We teach students to identify key points, lead with analysis, and integrate supporting examples. In Development, students demonstrated a minimal improvement of 1.2%.

**Integration of Sources:** Students typically start all research with a Google search. Students then lob their example like a shotgun and it lands randomly in the middle of their essays. We teach students to select optimal examples and supporting material and evaluate the credibility of their sources. We show students how to place their source material in the most effective locations. We also teach students how to weave their source material into the fabric of their essay by providing smooth transitions for their intended audience. In Integration of Sources, students demonstrated an improvement of 1.7%.

**Appropriate Citation Format:** Some students know exactly how to document their sources. Other students have no idea how to document anything. This conflict of needs makes citation a challenge to teach. We don't want to spend a tremendous amount of class time on this issue, but we need to be sure that every Juniata student knows how to cite correctly. We tend to teach and review this issue during individual conferences and research sessions in the library. **In Citation Format, students demonstrated a statistically significant improvement of 4.3%.**

**Mechanics:** Students have a tremendous variety of individual mechanical problems. Students often use commas randomly and demonstrate shaky proofreading skills. If spell check doesn't catch it, students often don't correct it. We address grammar issues in class and individually in conference. We show students different methods of editing and proofreading that help to suss out mechanical problems. **In Mechanics, students demonstrated a statistically significant improvement of 4%.**

## Planning & Future Directions

### Curriculum

The CWS curriculum is academically sound. Through periodic staff meetings, the staff constantly evaluates and refines our approaches and assignments. The staff freely shares resources and ideas with each other and instructors frequently try new materials to invigorate their classroom experience. We will continue with this orientation towards teaching and learning.

As we refine our assessment methodologies, we will continue to use the results of our assessment to steer our future efforts.

## **Staffing**

We always strive to minimize adjunct instructors. We need to identify potential CWS instructors during the recruitment and hiring phases. Since we have a goal of being inter-departmental, we need to encourage departments to build into their job descriptions a component that would allow for new hires to teach CWS, IC or CA. It is very difficult for professors to put aside a primary class within their department to assume teaching responsibilities in CWS. It would be easier (though no less controversial) to insert this teaching responsibility into new faculty hiring plans.

## **Needs**

In order to meet the demands of the assessment train that is rolling through higher education, the CWS Director has requested support from a variety of in-house resources. Carlee Ranalli has been very helpful in designing assessment models and procedures. We currently use trained Juniata College students as essay coders and hope to use Juniata College students to analyze the data. This reduces the cost of assessment but may compromise the quality of the data. In the future, we would like to use external reviewers.

We may also need to have someone from outside our department work on the statistical models and methods of statistical analysis. This could be completed in the summer or during the academic year.

As assessment becomes a larger component of the Director's responsibilities, she will need to attend further training and be further compensated to meet the demands.

## **Assessment**

Though the portfolio method produced reasonable data and was based on sound methodology, we do not feel it gave us formative feedback. We plan to use external reviewers to assess the 2009 CWS writing and for that purpose we collected all four completed essays from each CWS student. We have these materials on CDs and will arrange for an external reviewer(s) to review and assess these writing samples.

Some of the things that we would like to consider include:

- Keep enough data to do splits by GPA, SAT verbal, SAT writing, etc. to test for performance increases in higher versus lower achieving students.
- Examine differences between adjunct and full time faculty
- Examine incoming SAT scores to develop a regression model that might predict CWS success

We are also planning to organize focus groups of second-semester sophomores to gain insight into how well CWS prepared students for their academic career. Sophomores are an ideal group since they should have a keen awareness of what they were well prepared for and what they were Unprepared for. Their feedback could prove formative feedback for the CWS faculty.



Additionally, since we institutionally feel that we overlook sophomores, we will be providing a clear opportunity for their collective voice to be heard.

We will videotape all focus groups and would like to utilize Goodman funding or another source of funding to pay for an external reviewer.

### **Using the Results**

As we obtain yearly assessment results, we will continue to compare our results to our goals for CWS. Where we are achieving the desired results, we will continue working as we have. Where we fall short of desired results, we will evaluate best methodologies for teaching those components. We will review assessment results annually in our CWS summer workshops.

The CWS staff would benefit from training sessions led by outside experts. Once we have identified some of areas where we need improvement, we could have a workshop focused on improving teaching methodology. A summer workshop would allow time for instructors to integrate new ideas into their planning.

### **Closing Note**

The scientific paradigm of assessment seems at times to be an awkward fit for a class in which we try to teach a variety of academic and interpersonal skills. While the CLA may be assessing this critical thinking component of CWS, there are many aspects of CWS that do not fit neatly onto a rubric. Some of our best data may come from interviewing students at various points throughout their academic career and beyond.

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**The College Writing Seminar**  
***CWS – EN 110***  
***Fall 2009***

***Course Description***

This four-credit course integrates critical thinking, reading and writing skills, library research skills, and extended orientation to college. The College Writing Seminar (CWS) introduces you to the diverse modes of thought and communication that characterize the college experience, and will help you think and express yourself more effectively, in and out of the classroom. The integrative approach is based on the belief that curricular and co-curricular activities are inseparable, and that life skills cannot and should not be compartmentalized. CWS facilitates students' academic and social/personal transition to college and also provides a foundation for the type of reading, writing and communication skills you will need during your college career and throughout your professional life.

***Writing***

This semester, you will begin the process of expanding and enhancing your writing skills. Your ability to write well is essential to your success in your academic career and professional pursuits. In both academic and professional writing, you must be able to perform diverse writing tasks, such as describing someone or something accurately, explaining a process, developing an argument, analyzing a problem, providing reliable documentation, and integrating information. In this course you will practice and refine those skills.

This course conceives of writing as a process. Each stage of the process, from brainstorming and prewriting to drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading, has its own distinctive challenges. Learning to write well involves mastering the steps in the writing process and learning what strategies work best for you at each stage.

All CWS students will be writing four academic essays. All CWS students will have an opportunity to revise their writing in response to feedback by their instructors and peers.

**Revision and Revision Workshops:** Good writing is good rewriting. When you learn to revise, you are learning the most important secret of good writing. This semester, you will be writing multiple drafts of your essays, and learning how to make good choices even when the Muse of Inspiration hasn't made an appearance.

During revision workshops, you will be critiquing your own rough drafts and the rough drafts of other writers. You must bring a new version of your paper to every revision workshop that is scheduled. Your professor will designate particular class session for revision workshops.

**Conferences:** Instructors will schedule two conferences to discuss your writing. During these conferences, you will receive individual feedback on your writing. Your instructor is also available during regular office hours, and you are always welcome to drop in or make an appointment to discuss your concerns. You do not need to wait until a scheduled conference to discuss your work. Please be aware that

missing a scheduled conference appointment is equivalent to missing a class.

***Reading***

You will be reading a great deal in this class, not only the published works of professional writers, but also the rough drafts of your peers. The readings will introduce you to diverse and challenging points of view, and to a variety of strategies for solving writing problems similar to the ones you will encounter. CWS does not have a common text, so reading assignments may vary significantly from one instructor to the next. However, the purpose of our reading remains the same: to develop critical thinking and analytical skills, to decode and decipher different writing styles and methods, to evaluate and scrutinize argument in various forms.

***CWS Lab***

The CWS Lab provides an opportunity to explore the possibilities for learning both inside and outside the classroom. Weekly lab classes will explore the issues you face as a first-year student, such as leaving family and friends and becoming a part of a new community, learning how to balance academic and social life, and beginning to define academic and career goals. All CWS students will complete a Lab project that will be guided by both your CWS instructor and CWS Lab Leader.

**Guided Journal:** Your CWS Lab course assistant and/or CWS instructor will ask you to keep a journal throughout the semester. Please refer to your instructor’s syllabus for policies on the grading of the journal. Sometimes you will be asked to write your journal entries on topics discussed in class; at other times you may be free to choose your own topics.

**Cultural Events:** Attendance at cultural events on and off campus is encouraged. You will be required to attend five cultural events throughout the semester.

***Additional Requirements & Details***

**Attendance:** The CWS attendance policy is enforced in all sections.

<i>Meeting Time</i>	<i>Allowed Absences</i>	<i>Breakdown</i>	
MWF Classes	4 total absences	3 CWS Classes	1 CWS Lab
TTH Classes	3 total absences	2 CWS Classes	1 CWS Lab
<b><i>Missing a scheduled conference = 1 CWS Class Absence</i></b>			
<b>·Each additional absence in CWS Class or CWS Lab will result in a reduction in your final grade (up to 10 points per absence)</b>			

**Portfolios:** All students will submit a portfolio at the end of the semester. The portfolio will contain the semester's work in both CWS Class and CWS Lab. Students will have the opportunity to revise at least one previously graded paper for an improved grade in compliance with their instructor's individual syllabus. You should carefully archive all parts of your writing process including brainstorming, drafting, researching, revising, and more. Be sure to save all drafts of your papers and your graded final copy.

**Withdrawal Policy:** Withdrawal from this required four-credit course is discouraged except in most unusual circumstances. In order to withdraw from CWS, you must schedule a conference with your instructor and the CWS Director before Thanksgiving. Review your section syllabus to see if your instructor has specified a date for withdrawal.

**Final Grade:** Refer to your instructor's syllabus for her/his grading policies. Your final grade will be based on your academic writing and research (90%) and participation in class (10% to be distributed at your instructor's discretion). **A student who fails to submit a complete portfolio including all assignments cannot receive a passing grade. Late portfolios may not be accepted or may be heavily penalized.**

Participation refers to your active involvement in and contribution to the class discussions in CWS Class, CWS Lab, and peer editing/revision workshops. Attendance is considered separately (above). Completion of all CWS Lab assignments is required. **PLEASE NOTE:** The final grade may be lowered by a whole letter grade for each missing CWS Lab assignment.

**Academic Integrity:** "One of the strongest traditions in higher education is the value the community places upon academic honesty. Academic integrity is an assumption that learning is taken seriously by students and that the academic work that students do to be evaluated is a direct result of the commitment of the student toward learning as well as the personal knowledge gained . . . . The penalty for academic dishonesty may lead to dismissal from the College . . ." (*The Pathfinder*).

Using another writer's published or unpublished words and ideas and representing them as your own, without giving credit and acknowledging your source, is an act of academic dishonesty.

Using sources to complement, focus, support, and stimulate your thinking is an important part of academic writing, as long as you acknowledge your debt to other readers, thinkers, and writers. But using secondary sources, even when acknowledged, in place of your own thinking is not acceptable. When and how to use sources will be a subject of discussion this semester.

Unless you have your instructor's permission to work collaboratively, you are expected to submit your own work for all assignments, including CWS Lab assignments; students who submit the same assignments will be penalized according to Juniata's Academic Integrity Policy.

The penalty for plagiarism in this course is F for the entire assignment, and a report will be filed in the Provost's office. (Note: A second report of plagiarism makes you subject to expulsion from the college.) Please also refer to the Academic Integrity Policy in the *Pathfinder* online under the heading Academic Honesty: <<http://services.juniata.edu/pathfinder/honesty.html>>