First Year Writing Program
Rhode Island College
Annual Report
2009-2010

Enrollment and Staffing

According to statistics gathered by the Director of the Writing Program, the total number of sections offered in the 2009-2010 academic year is 66 (43 in fall; 23 in spring. See document in Appendix). Fall sections are often overenrolled (as many as 26 students in WRTG 100); in the spring, no sections of ENGL 010 and only one section of WRTG 100 are overenrolled. Most likely, this is due to the fact that advisors and department chairs encourage students to fulfill their writing requirement as soon as possible.

While such advice is encouraging—it indicates that FYW is seen as essential for success in future coursework and that it is considered a foundational course—it creates a strain on resources in the fall, when nearly half of all sections are overenrolled. More balanced enrollment might mitigate that factor. The urgency of getting "the" writing requirement "out of the way" might also be alleviated if RIC instituted Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID). In this way, writing would be seen as a constant activity and regular part of the curriculum at RIC, and WRTG 100 would not stand in such stark isolation, perceived as students' one opportunity to learn how to write for college. Instead, the course would be seen as an introduction to a way of learning that would be reinforced during a student's enrollment at RIC.

The enrollment capacity for WRTG 100 exceeds the recommendation from NCTE and CCCC, which is 20 students. In the fall of 2009, all sections were increased to 26 students from the capacity of 24, which is about 30% higher than the recommended capacity. Even one additional student affects the dynamics and level of instruction in a writing classroom, and limits the amount of one-on-one interaction students and instructors need in a writing classroom.

As a final point, adjunct instructors are an estimated 70% to 80% of all instructors teaching in FYW, and teach at least 80% of all sections taught in FYW. It's important to note that most instructors in the program are knowledgeable in the field and dedicated to the discipline and the students they teach. However, many teach at several institutions, and are therefore not easily able to participate (nor are they compensated for participating) in professional development opportunities, nor are they able to spend more one-on-one instruction with students outside of the classroom (particularly in light of the high enrollment capacity). The arguments against such a large percentage of adjuncts accounting for the total number of instructors in any program have been rehearsed elsewhere (see, for example, the pages of the *WPA* journal). But in light of the administration's efforts to increase

the visibility of the FYW Program, to improve its status, and to sustain conversations about writing-as-learning across campus, these high percentages contradict those goals and undermine the work being done in the FYW Program.

Assessment

Under the direction of COGE (Committee on General Education), the FYW Program participated in assessment for the first time. The Director of Writing, along with members of the English Department's Composition Committee (Jennifer Cook, Claudine Griggs, and Michael Michaud) constructed a pilot plan implemented in the spring of 2010 (to be revised in summer 2010). The plan asked instructors to select two students from each section that they taught (one "typical" student and one "atypical" student) and to collect all materials written and/or submitted by the student following Spring Break. Approximately twenty-five "portfolios" were collected and coded. As of the writing of this report, committee members are reading and ranking these portfolios based on the goals of COGE; in the coming months, rankings will be tabulated and reported to COGE, along with a narrative of some of the committee's findings and observations while reading the material. Based on these findings and the experiences of the committee, an assessment plan for future semesters will be in place for the 2010-2011 academic year.

Observations, Evaluations, and Professional Development

In the fall 2009, the Director of Writing chose to conduct observations (rather than evaluations) of FYW instructors, since she wanted to familiarize herself with the program and felt that evaluating a course that was new to her would be unfair to instructors. In the spring, evaluations for personnel files were conducted, and nearly all instructors were observed or evaluated over the course of the academic year (at least sixteen, although some were observed and/or evaluated more than once). For some instructors, permission was given to the Director of Writing to revise observations into evaluations for said files. After each observation/evaluation, instructors were invited to meet and talk about the classroom visit with the Director.

In direct response to the observations/evaluations, and combined with other conversations throughout the academic year, changes have been made to the program. For instance, in observing student and instructor lackluster responses to the required customized textbook, the contract with textbook's publisher has not been renewed for the next academic year. This allows instructors and students more flexibility in planning and choosing a section that more meets their respective interests. Additionally, future workshop topics, such as discussions on the place of grammar instruction in the FYW classroom, have evolved from observations. Less quantifiable, but no less important, is the fact that such classroom visits and subsequent conversations set a collegial tone for the relationship between the Director and instructors in the program.

Outreach and Communication

In 2009-2010, the FYW Program sought to improve outreach and communications to three different groups on the RIC campus: instructors of FYW, instructors of other courses, and students enrolled in FYW. Each constituency is essential to the progress and success of the writing program, and each needs to be aware of what FYW is, what it does, and what it can do. Being informed is

only half the equation, however; no program is successful without soliciting the opinions and suggestions of the very people it serves.

In terms of outreach to other programs and instructors of other programs, the Director directly communicated with or met with program heads and chairs, including but not limited to Karen Castagno and Susan Gracia in Education; Olga Juzyn in Modern Languages; Andrés Ramirez in the ESL program; Rachel Filinson in Sociology, Eric Hall in Biology, Mary Byrd in Nursing, and, along with Maureen Reddy and Michael Michaud, the School of Management. The FYW Program has been represented at the National Day on Writing (20 October 2009) and the Faculty Development Workshop, among other events. Additionally, the Writing Board held a meet-and-greet for the Directors of Writing and the Writing Center, and others—specifically, Maureen Reddy, Ron Pitt, and Claudine Griggs—have been excellent about referring faculty, staff and students to the Director of Writing when questions concerning the program arise. It is this kind of collaboration and emphasis on visibility that will help make the Writing Program a stronger presence on campus.

In these meetings and elsewhere, the focus has been on creating realistic expectations of FYW and to foster a dialogue about how other instructors and programs can build on what gets done in WRTG 100. While many faculty still believe that writing can and should be taught in a single-semester course, these outreach sessions bring the message that writing is an ongoing process that needs constant attention and practice. However, it's clear that other programs and departments are not sure what happens in WRTG 100, what outcomes are met, and what instructors can expect from students once they arrive in the classroom after WRTG 100. One of the goals for the 2010-2011 academic year is a revised, detailed statement of outcomes for WRTG 100. The Director is in the process of drafting that statement before bringing it to the attention of writing instructors and the Composition Committee in the fall of 2010. Official approval and distribution to the RIC community would take place at that time.

Feedback from instructors within the FYW Program is always welcome and encouraged, and the Director of Writing has made it a priority to communicate frequently and clearly with the writing faculty. There is a true spirit of collaboration in this program, which is remarkable for a program this size and so heavily staffed by adjuncts, many of whom have little "extra" time to spend on campus. Writing instructors take the opportunity to visit the program office, to email the director with suggestions and questions, and to participate in events. For example, as the program considered moving away from a required textbook, instructors were invited to pilot new textbooks (or a textbook-free classroom) and to consider new ways to teach writing at RIC—ways they may not have felt free to do before with the customized textbook (see the pilot proposal announcement in the Appendix). Email digests were sent out several times per semester, informing instructors of upcoming events and policy changes; reminding them of requirements; and soliciting feedback on the program. One event in particular drives home how collaborative the relationship is between WPA and instructors: when FYW instituted an assessment requirement, one instructor requested some clarification on this requirement because of confusion. The Director responded with a detailed FAQ document, which many writing faculty found helpful—and they said so.

The final piece of this equation is the students, many of whom have little direct contact with the FYW Program beyond enrollment and completion of WRTG 100. What can be done to work with students directly is an unresolved question, but the Program is working to increase communication among students, instructors and administrators, and to create transparency concerning what the FYW does and how it serves students. One step along the way was to include a letter from the

Director to students eligible for the Freshman Advantage Program. This simple act let students know that the course was attached to several programs, including the Writing Center. Future communications between students and administration include letting students know more about the outcomes and goals for the course; providing for more detailed course evaluations for WRTG 100 and English 010, where specific questions about writing instruction can be addressed; and making students part of the celebration of writing in October of 2010. As the program establishes a web presence, documents and policies will be more accessible and visible for all prospective, current, and past students.

President Carriuolo has introduced a number of teaching and staff awards this past year. In light of this, it would be helpful, in coming years, to reward good teaching and writing in FYW. While the future budget request for FYW does not allow for honorarium, one of the best ways to indicate appreciation for good work is to reward those who make the program successful. This is something to work towards in the future.

Additional Activities and Workshops

As mentioned above, the FYW Program participated in the National Day on Writing, an NCTE-sponsored event that was organized locally by RIWP, in conjunction with the Writing Center and the FYW Program. Students and instructors were asked to spend part of their day in a writing marathon, kicked off by Richard Louth, and to go to writing stations throughout campus. Plans are already underway to celebrate the day this October, and FYW plans to make it part of a weeklong celebration of the Program's work. This includes a College Lecture Series-sponsored speaker, Christina Ortmeier-Hooper, who will discuss ESL and identity.

 In March of this year, the Director organized a workshop to talk about alternate ways to respond to student writing. The first of its kind under the administration of the new Director, the workshop focused on small group tutorials—peer review-like sessions where the instructor serves as another reader—and grading conferences, both of which are designed to better utilize instructor time, freeing them up from grading papers in isolation. The participation was outstanding, with approximately eighteen people attending the sessions (offered at two different times for convenience). The audience consisted of full-time faculty, staff, and adjuncts, which further illustrates the great community of instructors here at RIC and their commitment to research. From that session—a handout of which is in the Appendix—more such workshops were requested, and ideas as to important topics and discussions were offered. The Director hopes to recruit writing faculty to lead future workshops, thus allowing them to be offered several times per semester. Finally, an Orientation for instructors, new and experienced, will be offered in late August so that the outcomes statement draft can be discussed, as well as changes to the program. Instructors will also be able to voice their concerns and make requests for future workshops.

Future Goals

For the academic year of 2010-2011 (and beyond), the FYW Program would like to:

1. Create and implement an assessment plan
2. Revise and distribute new outcome statement/course description for WRTG 100
3. Establish a web presence and logo

4. Celebrate the teaching and practice of writing across campus
5. Assist in establishing WAC and WID programs for RIC
6. Continue to educate faculty and administration on the work done in First Year Writing
7. Establish resources in Program office for instructors (i.e., sample syllabi, a textbook library) and continue to offer workshops
8. Communicate more directly and regularly with students
9. Establish competitive awards programs for the teaching of writing and for student writing within WRTG 100.
10. Increase number of sections taught by full-time faculty
11. Lower enrollment cap

Appendix

First-Year Writing Statistics Fall 2009
Reflects totals from the close of the add/drop period

Sections 010………………………………...	6
Sections 100………………………………	35
Sections 100H……………………………….	2

Total Sections First-Year Writing………... 43

Adjuncts………………………………….......	22
Faculty………………………………….......	7
Staff………………………………………	1

Total Instructors…………………………...30

Staffing

1. 23.33% of total instructors are tenure-track faculty
2. 3.33% of total instructors are staff (Writing Center Director)
3. 73.33% of total instructors are adjuncts

Sections

1. 16.3% of all sections are taught by tenure-track faculty
2. 2.3% of all sections are taught by staff (Writing Center Director)
3. 81.4% of all sections are taught by adjuncts

English 010

Capacity is 10 students*

# of sections below or at cap:	0
# of sections over cap:	1 section at 11 students
	5 sections at 14 students

1. All courses exceed capacity—100%
2. All but one course exceeds capacity by 40%
3. Combined, the over-enrolled seats could fill 2.1 additional 010 sections (at 133% capacity)

Theory: 10 students per section   x   6 sections   =   60 students max in ENGL 010
Reality: (5 sections x 14 students) + (1 section x 11 students) =   81 students in ENGL 010

*According to M. Reddy, the capacity is at 14 for this course. However, on RIConnect, the capacity is set at 10. This discrepancy needs to be addressed, and an official capacity needs to be employed across campus.

Writing 100

Capacity is 24 students
# of sections below cap: 5
# of sections at 24:   13
# of sections over 24:   (@25): 8
                     (@26): 8
                     (@ 27):1

1. 14.29% of sections are under-enrolled
2. 37.14% of sections are at maximum capacity
3. 48.57% of sections exceed capacity

Theory: 24 students per section   x   35 sections   =   840 students max in WRTG 100
Reality: Under-enrolled sections: 86 students
            Capacity sections: 312 students
            Overenrolled sections: <u>408 students</u>
                                  806 students

1. WRTG 100 is at 95.95%. Yet almost half of the sections are over-enrolled.
   a. Four of the five under-enrolled sections *do not* appear on RIConnect when searching for WRTG 100 courses; conclusion is that at least some of these courses are not open to general undergraduate population and are part of individual Learning Communities. Only one section (100-17) is under-enrolled (at 23 students) and also appears on RIConnect student/faculty screen.

First-Year Writing Statistics Spring 2010
Reflects totals from the close of the add/drop period

Sections 010……………………………... 3
Sections 100………………………………… 20
Sections 100H……………………………….0
Total Sections First-Year Writing………... 23

Adjuncts…………………………….......14
TT Faculty…………………………....2
Other Faculty/Staff…………………………1
Total Instructors…………………………...17

Staffing

4. 82.35% of total instructors are adjuncts
5. 11.76% of total instructors are tenure-track faculty
6. 5.88% of total instructors are other (one year appointment)

Sections

4. 13.04% of all sections are taught by tenure-track faculty
5. 4.35% of all sections are taught by other faculty/staff
6. 82.61% of all sections are taught by adjuncts

English 010

Capacity is 10 students*
# of sections below or at cap: 3

4. No courses exceed cap; course is at 76.67% capacity

*According to M. Reddy, the capacity is at 14 for this course. However, on RIConnect, the capacity is set at 10.

Writing 100

Capacity is 24 students
# of sections below cap: 7
# of sections at 24:   12
# of sections over 24:   1

4. 35% of sections are under-enrolled
5. WRG 100 is at 86.46% capacity

Writing 100 Pilot Proposals for Spring 2010

7 October 2009

Dear Instructors—

Our contract for the customized version of the Axelrod and Cooper text (*Axelrod and Cooper's Concise Guide to Writing*, fourth edition, RIC edition) expires at the end of this academic year. I hope to have many conversations with all of you as to what steps we should take next. These are some of the questions I have:

- Should we continue to use this/any textbook?
- Should we revise this textbook?
- Should we look for a new textbook altogether?
- Should we even require the same text for all sections?
- And what does this textbook, or any textbook, say about our Program's pedagogical approaches and goals? Should those goals be revised, too?

One way to answer some of these questions is to pilot some new ideas in Writing 100 classrooms. Towards that end, I am asking any interested instructors to propose a pilot course that they would like to teach in the spring 2010 semester. Proposals are due to me, either electronically (bcaouette@ric.edu) or via hard copy in my mailbox, by Friday, November 13, 2009. Below are some guidelines and suggestions for the process:

1. Big Changes, Little Changes: While this pilot project is prompted by the expiration of our contract with a book publisher, this pilot does not require that you change your choice of textbook; it does not require you use a textbook at all. You may choose to keep A&C and revise it; you may choose to keep the current edition of A&C and change the way you sequence assignments, share student writing, hold conferences or tutorials, etc. You may choose to examine one of the millions of other textbooks on the market right now, or you may opt not to use a textbook and explore other kinds of texts or media. You may organize your course thematically and decide to supplement A&C with other resources (articles, books or novels, movies, videos, podcasts, radio programs, art work, performances, artifacts, etc.). You may choose to collaborate with other instructors (and, indeed, collaboration is always encouraged; I welcome pilots where a number of instructors are participating). Most importantly, this is not an opportunity for any of us to teach a course that focuses exclusively on our "favorite things." It's a writing course, and this proposal recognizes that there are myriad ways to teach writing.

2. Bureaucratic Fine Print: Not all proposals will be "approved". I expect that, after I have read your proposal (perhaps in conjunction with the Composition Committee), a conversation between us would be in order. As instructors suggest pilots, I will also be working with others in the FYW Program to consider changes from an administrative perspective. After all this work, we might choose to stick with what we have and order more A&C for the next academic year. In other words, there are no guarantees, but there are plenty of opportunities.

3. Proposals: I would like pilot proposals to consist of rough drafts of the following: syllabus, course schedule/calendar, and some assignment sequences. If you are using a particular text apart from A&C, make sure to let me know so I can order a sample copy to peruse when I examine your proposal; if you're using articles or some other media, and it's possible, kindly

attach them so I can read them, too. In addition, I would like you to take some time apart from these other documents to describe your pilot program and what benefits you believe it might bring to the program. If you have seen this pilot work in other situations (i.e., at other schools), let me know. Accepted proposals will require some additional work (a mid-semester progress report in the spring, from you; input via evaluations from your students; observation by me or a colleague).

I expect this will be a learning experience for all involved, perhaps most especially me. Good writing programs are always evolving, based on research, practice, and theory. But no program gets better without the joint effort of all who teach the students. Thank you for that effort—and for being a part of the future of writing at RIC.

Sincerely,

Becky L. Caouette, Ph.D.
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Director of Writing
Rhode Island College
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401.456.8674

First Year Writing Program Teaching Workshop

Student Feedback, Revised: Small Group Tutorials and Grading Conferences

Two dates for your convenience (same workshop at each):

Wednesday March 3rd @ 5:00 & Thursday March 4 @ 12:00

Craig-Lee 265

Most of us spend a good deal of time reading student papers—and responding to them—in isolation. We might be sitting in our office, at our dining room table, or in the local coffee shop with nary a student of ours in sight. While we write thoughtful, engaged feedback for our students, it's hard to tell if students read our comments, act on our comments, or even understand our comments.

In this collaborative workshop, we'll discuss some alternate ways to provide student feedback that might allow more interaction with our students and less time writing to them in a void. We'll talk about ways to take the ideals of small group tutorials and grading conferences and adapt them for the different courses we teach here at RIC (**so instructors of all disciplines are welcome to participate**). Most importantly, we'll exchange information and ideas so that we can all become better responders to the writing that our students do.

Dessert and beverages will be served at both events. Bring your lunch/dinner and join us. Or just come and eat dessert. We won't judge you.

Sponsored by the First Year Writing Program. Questions? Contact Becky Caouette, Director of Writing, at 401.456.8674 or bcaouette@ric.edu.

Small Group Tutorials

Definition: Groups of 3, 4, or even 5 students who meet with the instructor in a roundtable-type setting. All group members (including students *and* instructor) are asked to read and comment on the first draft paper of every group member; with an eye towards helping each other revise for the final draft. A variation on the idea of peer editing, peer review, etc.

The Nitty-Gritty. And Variations on a Theme:

Frequency: Instructors needn't have an SGT for every and all assignments. But I urge you not to avoid SGTs because you are afraid to "cancel" class for a week, or four. First, class is still being held, just in small batches. Secondly, when done well, the work students do before, during, and after their SGT is often intensely challenging work and often on par (at least for me) with what they might do in regular class time over the course of a week.

SGT Size and Duration: Groups can consist of as many students as you think feasible. I meet with 3 students per hour, with varied results (some groups finish early, some late). This equals about 20 minutes per student. During the early SGTs, we usually have time left over because students are more reticent to talk. Later on in the semester, students are more talkative and know what is expected of them, so they talk more (so don't get discouraged early on in the semester by how much work you have to do—it's a chance to model good what good criticism looks and sounds like) . . .

Location: Anywhere! Of course you can use your classroom (provided you don't schedule tutorials outside your class time) or your office. But you can also meet in the Café, Alger, the Student Union—any place there is space and (relative) quiet. It would be nice to have people talking about writing all over campus, I think.

Dialogue: The whole goal of this exercise is to get students to talk to each other about their writing—preferably in a dialogue, not a monologue. Students might be tempted to speak just to you. Or just speak, one at a time, to the author, and then remain quiet for the rest of the session. I try to get them to resist this impulse.

Group Composition: The great question: to have the instructor arrange groups or to let students decide when they want to sign up? This is dependent on the instructor, the section, and the group dynamics. Some instructors form students into groups early on in the semester and have them work together frequently, so it makes sense to me to continue those groups in the SGTs. In terms of cliques, I find that students often just sign up for the most convenient time available. They may hope their friends also sign up for that time, but that is less of a concern or a requirement for them. Also, "bribery" works when schedules conflict. More on that during our workshop.

Exchange: Beware students emailing papers to each other and you. This can get ugly.

Reading: Some instructors ask students to read their papers ahead of time; some make their SGTs longer (1.5 hours, for example), and group members exchange and read all papers during the tutorial.

Revision Worksheets: It's up to you if you want to give students a worksheet to use as they read their peers' papers (as many of you do for peer review). For me, I find it cuts down on actual dialogue, but I am often in the minority on this—I've known instructors who use revision worksheets to great effect.

Authorial Responsibility: Regardless of whether or not you and your students use worksheets, etc., I think it important to stress that the author is responsible for his or her own text. That responsibility extends to taking notes on what his or her group mates, including me, say about his or her draft. I make very few comments or markings on my version of the student's draft, and those that I do make are really only decipherable by me. But I talk a lot—sometimes more than I should.

Grading Conferences

> Definition: An instructor-student conference (i.e., one-on-one) that takes place after a student's final draft has been submitted to the instructor. These sessions are usually short, and consist of the instructor responding to the student's final paper and informing the student of his or her grade. Often, these are much more directive than the SGTs, but that does not mean they have to be adversarial or contentious.

The Nitty-Gritty. And Variations on a Theme:

Frequency: Again, as often as the instructor wishes. Most instructors do not cancel class for these sessions, but rather use office hours or other time on-campus to conduct them. That makes them a little harder to plan, I acknowledge.

Size and Duration: Sessions are one-on-one (since student grades are confidential) and last anywhere from 10-15 minutes.

Location: Again, anywhere, although privacy concerns might force instructors to find a more secluded, less public place.

Dialogue: There is less time for dialogue here—although certainly it should not be the instructor talking *at* the student—because these sessions *stand in for the comments or feedback on final drafts that instructors often write up*, in isolation. However, I find that this is a great opportunity for students to "talk back" to me in writing. After students leave their Grading Conference, invite them to write a response to your GC and bring it to class next. This way they can think about their paper, your response, and where they situate themselves in the process.

Reading: You can read these papers right before you meet with the students; since you are not concerned with present your notes to students, you can jot down responses and reactions as you read and respond to the student immediately. How many GCs you plan for one day may dictate how you want to read and respond to them.

Authorial Responsibility: Again, as in the SGT, it is the student's responsibility to make note of what you say. If, like me, the absence of a paper trail freaks you out, there are some options. For example, you can have the student type up his or her notes from the session and then share them

with you; you can respond to them if you have another perspective of how the session went. Or, after the student leaves the GC, you might want to take a few minutes—and, seriously, time yourself—to jot down a bare-bones paragraph of what you said to the student for your own record.

SAMPLE

Small Group Tutorial Sign-Up Sheet

Monday February 15

10:00   _____
          _____
          _____

11:00   _____
          _____
          _____

12:00   _____
          _____
          _____

Wednesday February 17

10:00   _____
          _____
          _____

11:00   _____
          _____
          _____

12:00   _____
          _____
          _____

Tuesday February 16

1:00   _____
          _____
          _____

2:00   _____
          _____
          _____

SAMPLE

Grading Conference Sign-Up Sheet

Papers due on February 22 (Monday); Class is 10-12 on MW; Office Hours are MT and other times by appt. [This can be adjusted for your (and your students') schedule(s), so feel free to be creative.]. Papers are all returned in 8 days from the day you received them.

Tuesday 2/23
2:15   _____
2:30   _____
2:45   _____
3:00   _____
3:15   _____
3:30   _____
3:45   _____

Monday 3/1
09:00   _____
09:15   _____
09:30   _____
12:00   _____
12:15   _____
12:30   _____
12:45   _____

Wednesday 2/24
12:00   _____
12:15   _____
12:30   _____
12:45   _____
12:30   _____

Tuesday 3/2
2:45   _____
3:00   _____
3:15   _____
3:30   _____
3:45   _____