
THE EFFECTS OF WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM ON COLLEGES

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Barbara Nodine began by describing the studies that she conducted at Beaver College in 1977 and 1981. She devised questionnaires for faculty members and students in all departments to answer. These instruments were designed to evaluate faculty attitudes and practices and students' attitudes toward writing. Nodine was concerned with documenting changes that have occurred as a result of faculty involvement in workshops that focused on writing across the curriculum.

The first part of the questionnaire addressed to faculty included the following items: number of papers required in a course, length of the papers, definition of audience for the student, description of the papers' purposes, format, allowance for peer and/or professor preview of papers-in-progress, presence of feedback from professor on papers-in-progress, use of ungraded writing assignments, and consideration of written expression as well as content. The second part of the faculty questionnaire dealt with faculty attitudes toward the importance of grammar, the importance of the composing process, the question of which departments should be concerned with teaching writing, the number of rough drafts allowed, willingness on the part of the teacher to help students learn to write within the context of his discipline, the penalty for mechanical errors, the value of drill in grammar, the use of writing assistants as readers, the use of pre-writing and editing as part of the writing process, and departmental responsibility for delivering adequate in-

struction in writing. The third part of the faculty questionnaire presented a student essay and asked faculty to read the paper and supply helpful commentary.

The student questionnaire, devised by a senior in psychology at Beaver College, examined students' opinions about writing in general, about their own process of writing, and about the writing techniques they had been exposed to in courses. Nodine discussed the results of the 1977 study in detail. Between 1977 and 1981, faculty members in the different disciplines participated in a series of workshops on teaching writing. They worked together to reinforce the importance of writing in each discipline, and they began to see the need for presenting writing assignments in such a way that students would understand and be alert for audience and purpose. Workshop faculty also agreed that greater consideration should be given to students' writing processes rather than to conventional rules and that the responsibility for teaching writing did not rest with the English Department alone.

When the faculty were again questioned in 1981, it was clear that they had more positive attitudes toward teaching writing. In particular, two items on the questionnaire indicated a positive change: a new focus on instruction in writing, and the opportunity for students to write more than one draft. Also, greater attention was being paid to diversity in the type and length of writing assignments and their comments to students were more helpful and positive. Nodine discussed other results of the 1981 survey, and she concluded by stating that she believes that individual faculty members, in their respective disciplines, must be the ones to decide what the writing requirements are in their particular courses. They need to think through their assumptions and meet with one another. Regardless of their field, professors should teach students to write in their discipline. ■