

# **A Tripartite Model for WAC: Writing Intensive, Writing to Learn, and Writing in the Disciplines**

***Creating a Culture of Writing  
at the University of Saint  
Thomas***

# A bit of history...

- **1980's**: St. Thomas received a Bush Grant and offered WAC workshops to faculty, but ultimately, WAC failed to become a part of the curriculum.
- **2003**: Core Curriculum Task Force initiated a once-a-decade review of the core curriculum. Their goal: **“To develop a curriculum that brings the mission to life.”**

# Our Mission

*“Inspired by Catholic intellectual tradition, the University of St. Thomas educates students to be morally responsible leaders who think critically, act wisely, and work skillfully to advance the common good.”*

# Our Core Curriculum

*68 Credits*

*3 Courses (12 credits) each:*

- ✓ Theology
- ✓ Natural Science and Mathematical and Quantitative Reasoning
- ✓ Language and Culture

*2 Courses (8 credits) each:*

- ✓ Literature and Writing
- ✓ Philosophy

*1 Course (4 credits) each:*

- ✓ Historical studies
- ✓ Fine Arts
- ✓ Social Analysis
- ✓ Human Diversity

In the end, the Core Curriculum Task Force identified **five focus areas** to strengthen in the core curriculum:

1. **Deliberate Integration**
2. Learning Communities
3. Globalization
4. Service Learning, Urban Character, Social Justice
5. Linking liberal education to career preparation

# 1. **Deliberate Integration:**

## **a. Development of a WAC Program**

2. Learning Communities

3. Globalization

4. Service Learning, Urban Character, Social Justice

5. Linking liberal education to career preparation

To accomplish the five goals, 11 Auxiliary Task Forces were created to develop proposals.

The **WAC Auxiliary Task Force** included representation from English, philosophy, sociology, biology, social work, and communication studies.



- **November, 2007:** The WAC proposal developed by the Auxiliary Task Force was passed by the Faculty Senate
- **December 2008:** I was appointed WAC Director
- **June 2009:** The first WAC seminar, led by Dr. Chris Anson, took place.

# *As of June 29, 2012.....*

- **Seven cohorts of faculty** will have completed the five-day January and June seminars led by Chris Anson since June 2009.
  - 127** faculty from **30** academic disciplines
  - 2** staff (faculty development and service learning)
- **272** official WAC courses taught

# Academic departments with WAC faculty:

- Accounting
- Art history
- Biology
- Catholic Studies
- Chemistry
- Communications and Journalism
- Economics
- Engineering
- English
- Entrepreneurship
- Ethics and Business Law
- Finance
- Geography
- Geology
- Health and Human Performance
- History
- Justice and Peace Studies
- Management
- Marketing
- Mathematics
- Modern and Classical Languages
- Music
- Operations and Supply Chain
- Philosophy
- Physics
- Political science
- Psychology
- Social Work
- Sociology
- Theology

***What does WAC look like  
at UST?***

# **We offer three types of WAC Courses:**

# WRITING INTENSIVE COURSES

*At least two core curriculum courses required,  
only one of which may be in English*

*Enrollment cap: 20 students*

- **Writing Intensive**

- ✓ Focus on writing as *process and product*.
- ✓ Students receive substantial and direct instruction in the writing process, with class time devoted to discussion of writing.
- ✓ Students practice writing as a process.
- ✓ Students receive formative feedback on drafts from their professors.
- ✓ At least half the course grade is based on writing.

# WRITING TO LEARN COURSES

*At least one course required, any discipline*

*Enrollment cap: 25 students*



- **Writing to Learn**

- ✓ Focus is on writing *as a process* for critical thinking and discovery.
- ✓ While the writing process is not explicitly taught, the course is infused with WTL practices and pedagogies.
- ✓ Frequent, rather than formal, opportunities for students to engage in writing as a process of learning: journals, dialogues, micro-themes, exploratory exercises, blogs, etc.

# WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES COURSES

*One course required  
in the student's major field of study  
Enrollment cap: 20 students*

- **Writing in the Disciplines**

- ✓ Focus is on writing as a *product*.
- ✓ Students learn to write in the manner of those practicing in their fields of study, learning conventions of writing and the rationale behind them.
- ✓ Students receive substantial and direct instruction in writing.
- ✓ Students receive formative feedback on drafts from their professors.
- ✓ At least 30% of the course grade is based on writing.

# Why did we set it up this way?

## *For Students...*

**Close attention to the writing process comes early in their college careers:** what they learn in English is quickly reinforced in another core curriculum course or courses.

**Elements of writing to learn** introduced in the core Writing Intensive courses **are reinforced at least once** (probably a few times) in Writing to Learn courses throughout the curriculum.

They learn **the specifics of writing in their major fields of study** as they take courses in their majors, including a strategically-placed Writing in the Disciplines course.

# Why did we set it up this way?

## *For Faculty...*

**Choice: Individual faculty members as well as departments may choose** which type of WAC course best fits their student learning goals.

Faculty experience **increased awareness** of the different roles writing may play in their classes as they discern what will work best for which courses.

The parameters for the three types of WAC courses offer sufficient **flexibility** for faculty: e.g., method of faculty response in WI courses; number and types of WTL assignments; what disciplinary genres are taught in WID courses.

# Why did we set it up this way?

*For the University...*

We are creating a **culture of writing**.

Our WAC program **deliberately integrates** not only the courses in the core curriculum, which was its original intent, but in **the entire curriculum**: core courses, electives, major.

# *Curriculum Alignment*



**College/University  
Mission**

**Department or Program  
Goals**

**Individual Course  
Objectives**

**Writing Assignments  
High Stakes  
Low Stakes**

**Writing Assignment  
Evaluation Rubrics**

# **Assessment:**

## **What the students think**



At the end of each WAC course, **students in WAC courses fill out surveys** (now done through the online survey tool Qualtrics) in which they indicate the following:

- What **forms of support** they received on their writing
- The **degree of usefulness** of each of these forms of support
- **Their attitudes towards academic writing** 1. Before taking the course and 2. As it was approached in the WAC course.

# Out of 2,116 students surveyed over three years...

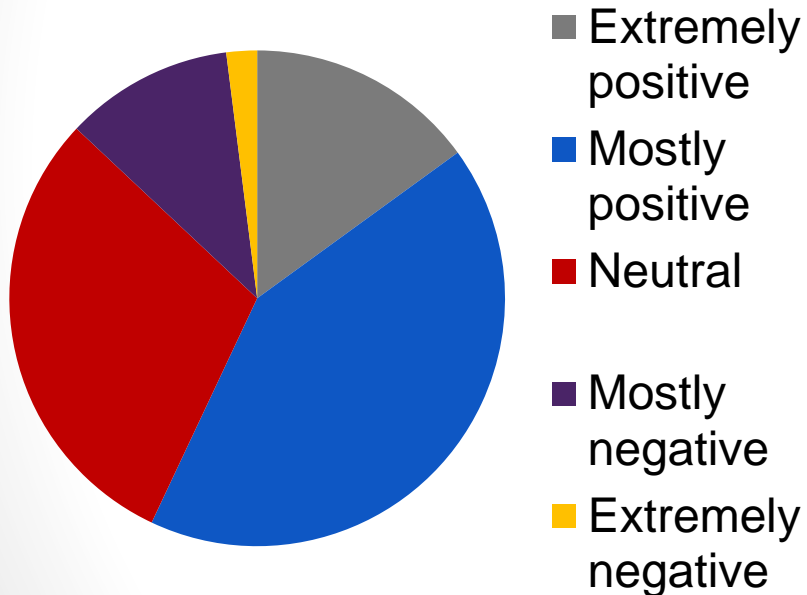
The percentage of students who felt negative or extremely negative attitudes (13%) went **down four percentage points** (9%).

The percentage of students whose attitude was neutral (30%) went **down 13 percentage points** (17%).

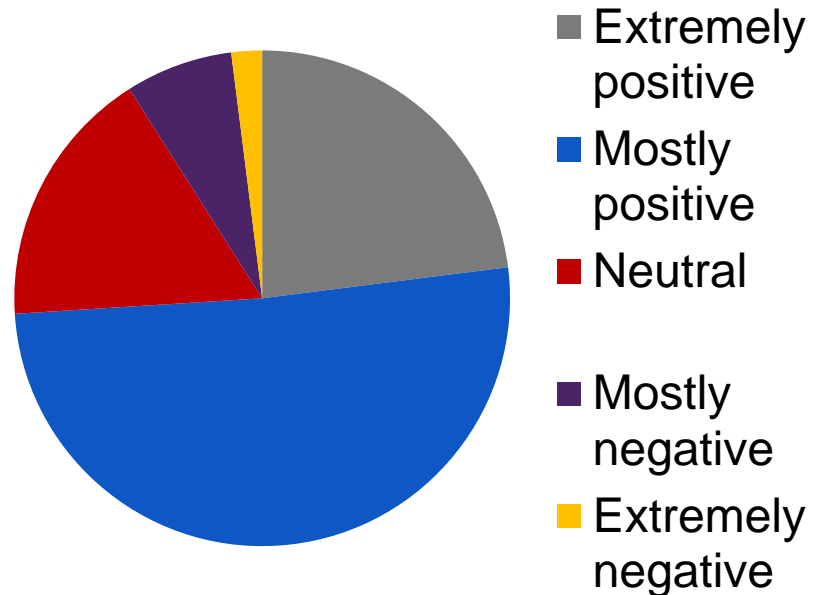
The percentage of students whose attitude was extremely or mostly positive (57%) went **up 17 percentage points** (74%).

# Results of the Attitude Question Fall 2009-Spring 2012

## Before WAC Course



## WAC Course



# Challenges

- **Maintaining course enrollment caps** (20 in WI and WID; 25 in WTL).
- Obtaining commitments from core course departments to offer a certain number of **Writing Intensive** courses each year.
- Helping individual departments to discern their **Writing in the Disciplines** course and scaffold writing in other courses around that course.
- **Funding.**

**WAC**

***UST***

***Learn to Write***

***Write to Learn***