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## UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' COMPETENCE IN WRITTEN COMMUNICATION ASSESSMENT AND INSTRUCTION

March 2024

The University of Virginia promotes undergraduate competency in written communication. Each of the nine schools serving undergraduate students defines general education requirements, which include courses in humanities, social sciences, and sciences that require students to express their ideas in writing.

Assessment of students' competency in written communication, fundamental to developing the full potential of students, serves to identify strengths and weaknesses in students' written communication skills that can be addressed through instruction. Direct assessment of student writing entails evaluation based on defined criteria such as consideration of audience, organization, development of ideas, and syntax. The goal of improving students' written communication entails understanding a range of factors over and above direct assessment of their writing—from learning opportunities to students' experiences and self-assessment—all of which can affect students' competence.

Together, assessments of students' written communication in multiple disciplines and students' self-assessments and experiences have informed an overall understanding of written communication and instruction at the University. This report describes 1) opportunities in the curriculum for students to learn how to write well; 2) a direct, criteria-based assessment of students' competency in written communication; 3) students' self-assessment of their ability to be clear and effective in their writing; and 4) the initiative, *Writing Across the Curriculum*, undertaken by the University to improve instruction in writing and thereby students' ability to write well.

## WRITTEN COMMUNICATION: OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN AT UVA

All undergraduate students (other than *Echols Scholars*<sup>1</sup>) in the College of Arts and Sciences are required to successfully complete designated courses—*First Writing Requirement*<sup>2</sup> courses—which are designed to develop their capabilities in communicating through the written word. The School of Architecture, the School of Nursing, and the School of Education and Human Development also require their direct admission undergraduates to take *First Writing Requirement* courses. In these courses, students submit multiple major writing assignments and engage in drafting, feedback, and revision. Subsequently, students in the College are required to fulfill the *Second Writing Requirement*<sup>3</sup> by taking an identified writing intensive course in which they write at least 15-20 pages or more in response to two or more assignments during the semester. This requirement has two goals: to provide additional writing instruction and opportunity for practice and feedback, and to expose students to writing conventions in their chosen field of study.

The College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Engineering and Applied Science, which together account for 8 in 10 undergraduate students at UVA, provide a window into the curricula that support instruction in written communication.

### COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES: *COLLEGE CURRICULUM*

In October 2019, the faculty of the College of Arts & Sciences approved the adoption of the *College Curriculum* as the general education requirements for Arts & Sciences undergraduates. The *College Curriculum* entails three groups of requirements: *The Engagements*, *The Literacies*, and *The Disciplines*. Students must complete all three subcomponents, accounting for 51-55 credits in the College. Transfer credit, including AP, IB, and Dual enrollment credit can count towards requirements in the Literacies and Disciplines sub-components.

The *Engagements* are a series of four courses taken exclusively in the first year of study. The Engagements introduce students to four intellectual dispositions that undergird all scholarly inquiry at the collegiate level:

- Engaging Aesthetics
- Empirical and Scientific Engagement
- Engaging Differences
- Ethical Engagement

The *Literacies* help students master vital skills and expand their capacity to understand and engage the world even more deeply. Students learn how to communicate in speech and writing through the completion of two writing-intensive courses, equip themselves with the study of a “world language”

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<sup>1</sup> <https://echols.as.virginia.edu/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://writingrhetoric.as.virginia.edu/requirements>

<sup>3</sup> <https://gened.as.virginia.edu/second-writing-requirement>

through the intermediate level, and learn to communicate with numbers through the completion of two courses in the “Quantitative, Computational, and Data Analysis” category.

The *Disciplines* ask students to explore the different scholarly practices and disciplinary thinking manifest throughout the Arts & Sciences. Students complete one course in each of the following seven categories of classes:

1. Artistic, Interpretive, & Philosophical Understanding
2. Chemical, Mathematical, & Physical Universe
3. Cultures & Societies of the World
4. Historical Perspectives
5. Living Systems
6. Sciences & Society
7. Social and Economic Systems

As of this year, AY2023-2024, the Engagements curriculum has been fully scaled to serve all students in Arts and Sciences. During the roll-out, the program underwent comprehensive assessments in AY 2018-19 and AY2019-20 with reports provided to the faculty. Since then, the program conducts both programmatic and learning outcomes assessments semi-annually.

## SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING AND APPLIED SCIENCE: THE ENGINEER, ETHICS, AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

The School of Engineering and Applied Science (SEAS) was established in 1836 as the first engineering school in the South. With continued growth on the horizon, it currently serves nearly three-thousand undergraduates studying nine engineering disciplines, the second largest school at UVA in terms of enrollment. The mission of SEAS is *to make the world a better place by creating and disseminating knowledge and by preparing engineering leaders to solve global challenges*. Among its core values is “imbuing students with technical and professional knowledge that is applied with integrity and wisdom, so they are fully prepared to be the leaders of the future.” While each of the undergraduate engineering degree programs determines its curriculum, all students are required to complete two year-long SEAS courses that provide instruction in writing:

- Offered for the first time in AY 2023-24, a two-semester first-year course—*Engineering Foundations*—provides instruction in writing and oral communication in the field of engineering and introduces students to engineering practice and design, incorporating societal and ethical concepts.
- A SEAS requirement for over 25 years, *STS and Engineering Practice* and *The Engineer, Ethics, and Professional Responsibility* is a two-course sequence in which students plan, research, and write their Undergraduate Thesis Portfolio, which includes: the technical capstone project report of their major discipline; a Prospectus for doing a specific research project to examine the social, ethical, and professional issues of concern in the technical project; the final STS Research Paper;

and a synthesis of the technical and STS papers. Students also present their work in a formal oral presentation.

Unlike similar programs at peer institutions that are offered through colleges of humanities or social sciences, being situated within the engineering school, these two year-long courses enable the school to educate its students within the immediate context of engineering and to provide broad understanding and critical socio-technical thinking to their technical work. The breadth and depth of formal and informal writing, oral presentations, and teamwork covered in these courses is essential to the preparation of future engineers, who will have to draw on these skills in their daily work.

## WRITTEN COMMUNICATION: DEFINITION AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Written communication is the expression of ideas in writing and the vehicle for the development of those ideas. Written communication can involve learning to work in different genres and styles. Moreover, it can involve working with different writing technologies, and mixing texts, data, and images.<sup>4</sup> Six student learning outcomes follow from this definition. The University assessed students' abilities to:

1. explain the issue and clearly state the context and purpose for writing appropriate to the audience.
2. interpret and incorporate information and evidence to accomplish the assignment's purpose.
3. organize their paper coherently across the document and within each section.
4. develop their ideas/argument by analyzing content to achieve the paper's main purpose.
5. draw logical conclusions and explain implications and consequences.
6. use structure, sentences, language, and grammar that clearly communicate meaning to readers.

## WRITTEN COMMUNICATION: ASSESSMENT METHODS

Following up on earlier assessments, in 2022 the University undertook an assessment of undergraduate student proficiency in written communication. The assessment incorporated two methods: direct assessment of samples of student writing, and a survey that elicited students' self-assessment of their skills in written communication and their experiences with and attitudes about writing instruction.

### DIRECT ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT WRITING

The direct assessment focused on the six learning outcomes designated above that define proficiency in written communication.

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from: Association of American Colleges and Universities <https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/written-communication>

A representative sample of third- and fourth-year students' course work was assessed by applying a rubric mapped to the six learning outcomes, based on the AAC&U VALUE Written Communication rubric,<sup>5</sup> and modified as needed to reflect disciplinary expectations. In total, faculty raters scored each outcome for over 300 student papers from 18 courses according to this scale: 1=Developing; 2=Competent; 3=Proficient; 4=Highly proficient. Each paper was scored by at least two raters to assure consistency. Scores were weighted by school/discipline and program.

Expectations for students' proficiency in written communication were determined by the faculty committee providing oversight of the assessment. The measure of proficiency was the total score on the rubric. Among third- and fourth-year students, 25% were anticipated to receive scores of highly proficient (earned 80% of possible score points); 75% scores of proficient or higher (earned 65% of possible points); 100% scores of competent or higher (earned at least 50% of possible points).

The assessment revealed that 36% of students' papers scored as highly proficient, well above expectations (25%); 67% scored as proficient or better (lower than target of 75%); and 91% scored as competent (lower than target of 100%). These results should be considered with caution for two reasons, both related to the impact of the pandemic. The sampled papers had been submitted by third- and fourth-year students enrolled in Fall 2021 or Spring 2022 courses. These students, just one and a half to two years prior, had experienced the sudden pandemic-driven switch to online classes and new grading schemes on top of the personal stress of negotiating a pandemic. That experience may have affected their opportunities to learn best practices in writing and to gain experience in writing. Overall inter-rater reliability in the assessment sessions was marginal, probably also related to the pandemic impacts. Challenges included unexpected variability in assignments and student writing and instructors' limited time availability due to other pressing obligations.

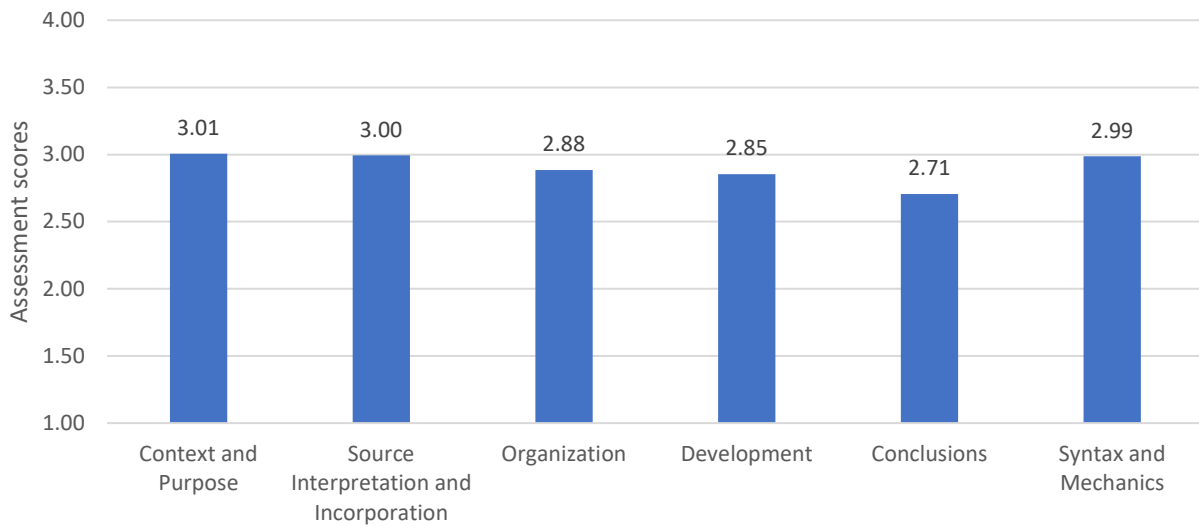
Students' papers scored highest on Context and Purpose (mean=3.01), Source Interpretation and Incorporation (mean=3.0), and Syntax and Mechanics (mean=2.99) (Figure 1). Papers scored lowest on Conclusions (mean=2.71). Results for all outcomes can generally be interpreted as "proficient" or "approaching proficient."

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aacu.org/initiatives/value-initiative/value-rubrics/value-rubrics-written-communication>

**Figure 1**

*Average Writing Scores by Outcome*



*Note.* A four-point scale was used for assessment scoring; 1=Developing, 2=Competent, 3=Proficient, 4=Highly Proficient

## STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

For the assessment via survey, this report relies on results from the Student Experience in the Research (SERU)<sup>6</sup> survey which the University administers biannually. All undergraduate students, representing all four classes, are invited to take the survey. In 2022, 24% of students (3950 students) did so. The survey addresses students' educational, extracurricular, and social experiences at the University. Among the topics, the survey asks students about written communication, including about instruction they receive in writing and about their perception of their own skills in written communication since they matriculated. The following analyses represent answers from students in all four classes and from all population groups (including gender, first-generation, international/not a citizen, low-income/Pell Grant recipient, and race).

The survey asks students to self-assess their skills in written communication when they started at UVA and "now." SERU results reveal students' perception that, on average, their ability to be clear and

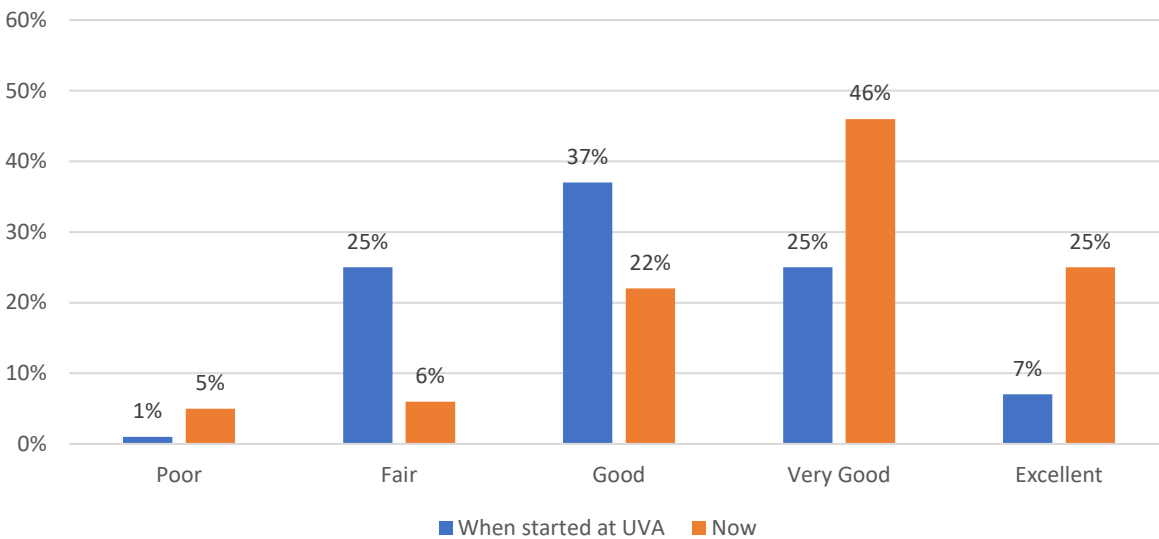
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<sup>6</sup> [Student Experience in the Research University](#)

effective when writing improved during their undergraduate education (Figure 2). While 32% of respondents assessed their proficiency as very good or excellent when they started at UVA, fully 71% assessed their proficiency “now” as very good or excellent, consistent with the direct assessment of student writing. Likewise, 26% of respondents assessed their proficiency as poor or fair when they started, a percentage that shrank to 11% “now.” Note: as the respondents represented all classes, these changes represent self-assessments over the course of one to four years.

**Figure 2**

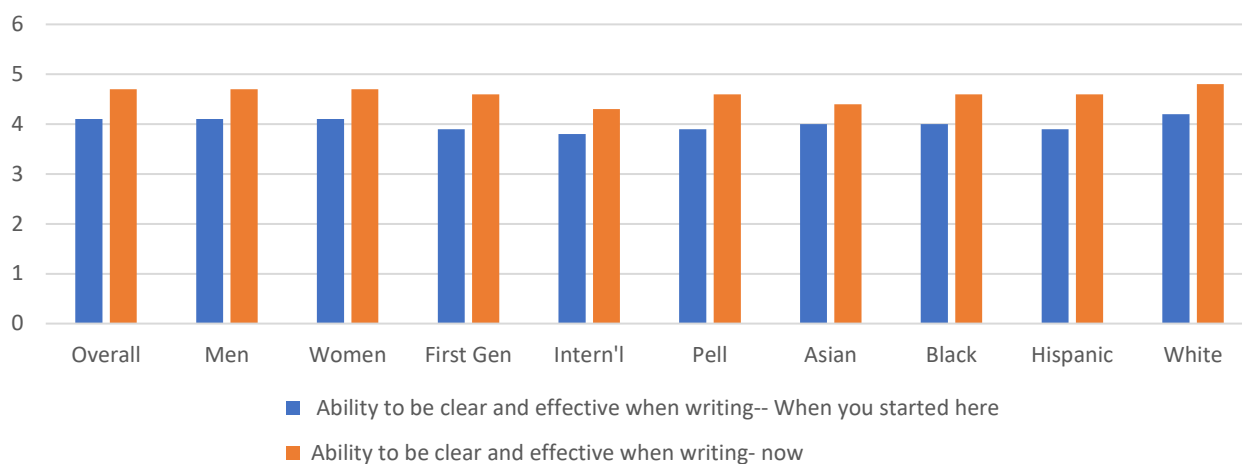
*Survey Respondents’ Self-assessment of their Ability to be Clear and Effective When Writing When Started at UVA and “Now”*



Under-represented minority (URM) groups, such as international students, Pell grant recipients, and Asian, Black, and Hispanic students rated their proficiency lower on both self-assessments—“when started” and “now” (Figure 3). Respondents from these groups did increase their self-assessments by 15-18% between “when started” and “now.” Among these groups, first-generation students were alone in rating their proficiency “now” equally high as non-URM populations.

**Figure 3**

*Survey Respondents' Self-Assessed Ability to be Clear and Effective when Writing When Started and "Now," by Population Group*



*Note.* Survey responses represent the following scale; 1=Very poor, 2=Poor, 3=Fair, 4=Good, 5=Very Good, 6=Excellent

### SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS

In combination, the results of the direct assessment of student papers and the results from the self-assessments by survey respondents reflect proficiency—and growing proficiency—among a large proportion of undergraduate students. Based on assessments of students’ papers, more than one third of students were deemed highly proficient in written communication, two-thirds as proficient or better, and 9 in 10 as competent or better.

## WRITTEN COMMUNICATION: WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM (WAC) INITIATIVE



In response to earlier assessments of undergraduate competency in written communication, in 2018, the University of Virginia launched a Writing Across the Curriculum<sup>7</sup> (WAC) initiative. Sponsored by the Office of the Provost, the goals were to: (1) expand students' opportunities for writing across their academic careers, (2) increase students' writing proficiency, (3) deepen students' engagement with learning, (4) create a community of faculty actively engaged in the development of student writing through instruction and mentorship, and (5) foster a campus culture that supports writing.

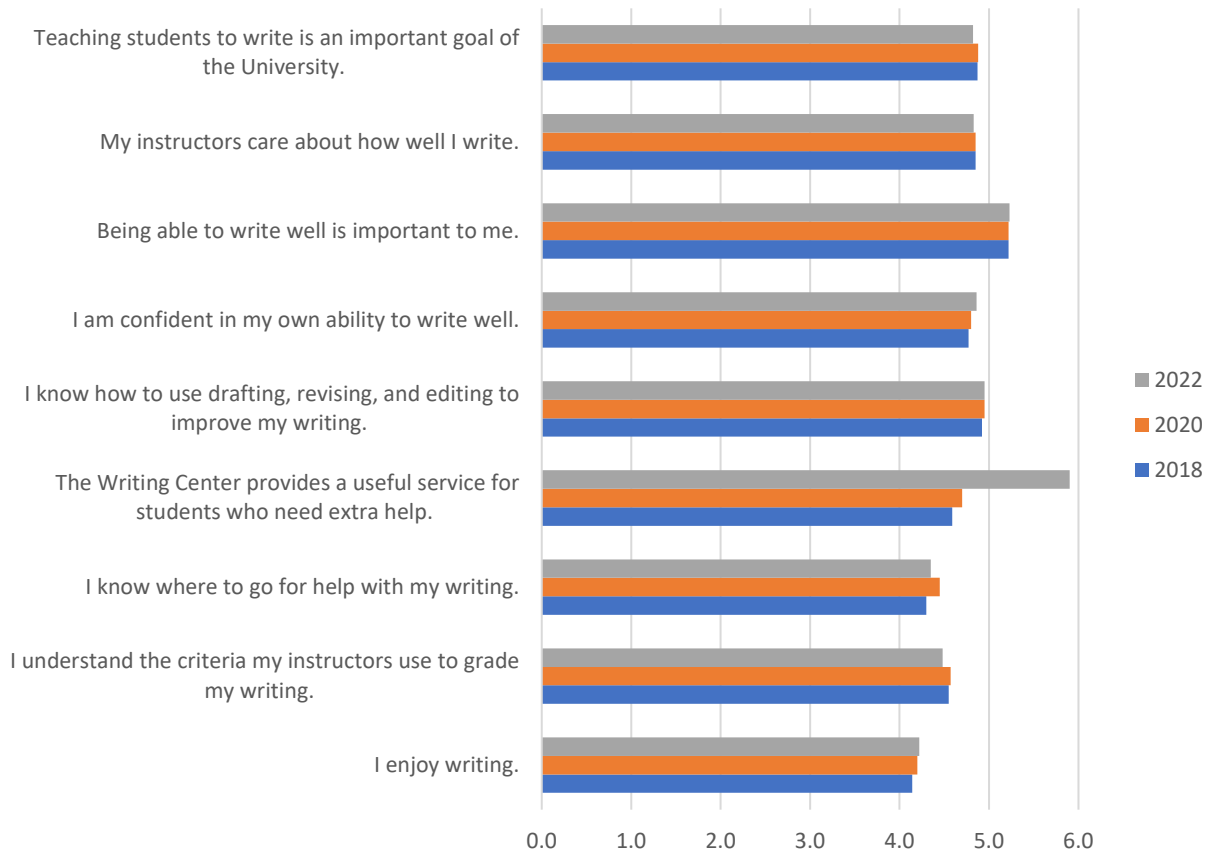
As reflected in SERU survey results from 2018, 2020, and 2022, UVA students consistently affirm the WAC goals. Survey respondents on average agree that "teaching students to write is an important goal of the University," that "my instructors care about how well I write," and that "being able to write well is important to me" (Figure 4). Moreover, survey respondents agreed that they "are confident in their own ability to write well" and that they "know how to use drafting, revising, and editing to improve their writing."

**Figure 4**

*Survey Respondents' Agreement with Aspects of Writing Instruction and Proficiency*

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<sup>7</sup> <https://writingrhetoric.as.virginia.edu/wac>



*Note.* Survey responses represent the following scale; 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=somewhat disagree, 4=somewhat agree, 5=agree, 6=strongly agree

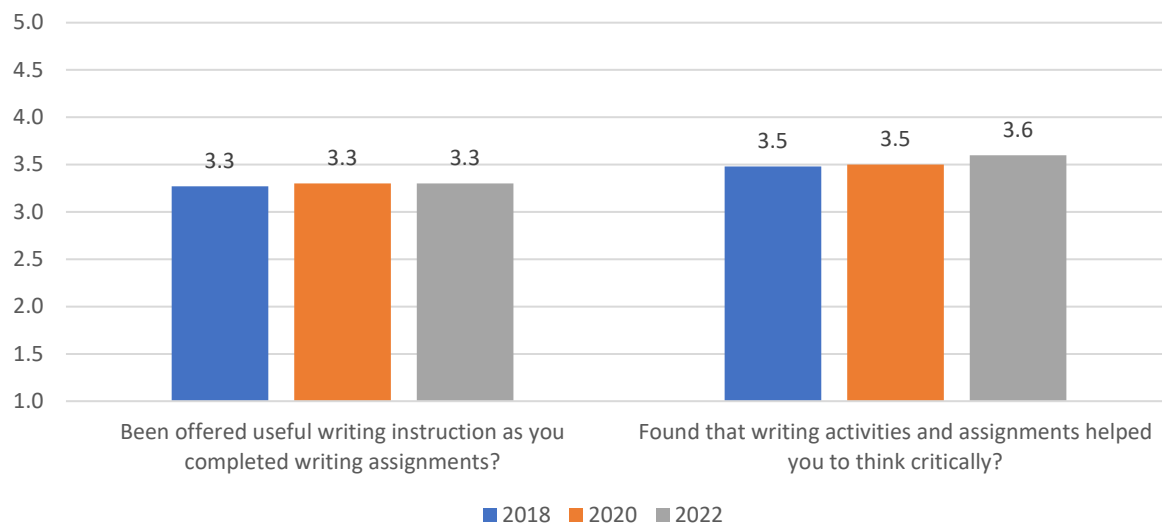
Survey respondents somewhat agree that they know where to go for help with their writing, that they understand the criteria their instructors use to grade their writing, and that they enjoy writing. They agree that “the Writing Center provides a useful service for students who need extra help.” Interestingly, respondents’ recognition of the Writing Center increased remarkably in 2022 as compared with previous years. We attribute that increase to marketing that the Writing Center launched post-pandemic, including outreach to students and faculty, and possibly to increased enthusiasm for in-person collaboration post-pandemic. In presentations around the University, WAC leadership also persistently addressed misunderstandings about the Writing Center’s scope, highlighting that the Center was a resource for all UVA student writers--undergraduate and graduate.

Responses to two survey items may suggest that more instruction is needed. On average, across all their courses, respondents reported that they occasionally were offered useful writing instruction as they completed writing assignments (Figure 5). Similarly, they occasionally found that writing assignments

helped them to think critically. These findings are consistent since 2018. Worth noting, Asian and male students were less likely to report that they were offered writing instruction in their courses.

**Figure 5**

*Survey Responses to Two Questions: Across all Your Courses, How Frequently Have you...*



*Note.* Survey responses represent the following scale; 1=never, 2=rarely, 3=occasionally, 4=often, 5=very often

In light of these assessments, the WAC initiative has worked to enrich undergraduate writing across both required and nonrequired courses by (1) providing faculty across all disciplines resources on the teaching of writing, (2) supporting existing required writing courses in the College, (3) supporting the integration of writing and writing instruction in courses across the University.

### FACULTY RESOURCES AND WRITING-ENRICHED PEDAGOGY

Since 2018, the WAC team has provided pedagogical support through seminars for faculty and graduate instructors across all disciplines on the teaching of writing, tailored workshops and consultations, and training sessions for graduate teaching assistants. Between 2018 and 2022, over 500 instructors participated in these offerings.

Since 2014, the Writing and Rhetoric Program has offered a four-day intensive seminar (the Faculty Seminar on the Teaching of Writing) for faculty in the disciplines seeking to incorporate writing into their courses. Subsequently, the curriculum of this seminar was reframed to emphasize WAC pedagogy approaches more explicitly. As a key development, the criteria that define a Writing-Enhanced (WE) pedagogy were articulated and disseminated.

Assessments of faculty participant confidence in teaching writing revealed higher levels of confidence in implementing recommended techniques such as incorporating writing activities in the classroom; providing opportunities for revision; and providing useful feedback to students on their writing. Participants also expressed confidence in their ability to develop their own approach to effective writing instruction. Comparing average confidence scores pre- and post-seminar, participants in the seminars expressed increased confidence in their ability to promote students' appreciation for writing; enhance students' use of writing for inquiry; create nontraditional writing assignments; incorporate writing activities in the classroom setting; and facilitate class discussions about writing.

Participants in the Graduate Instructor Seminars on the Teaching of Writing also were more likely to express confidence in their ability to enhance students' use of writing for inquiry and incorporate writing activities in the classroom setting. In addition, they were likely to express increased confidence in their ability to design writing-enhanced courses; clearly communicate criteria for assessment and grading; know when and where to refer students who need extra help with their writing; develop their own approach to effective writing instruction; and provide students with opportunities for revision.

The most changed responses between the pre- and post-seminar surveys were participants' ability to design writing-enhanced courses; incorporate writing activities in the classroom setting; enhance students' use of writing for inquiry; create nontraditional writing assignments; and facilitate class discussions about writing.

In addition to hosting and teaching the seminars for faculty and graduate student instructors, WAC leadership continue to work with faculty, departments, and schools, including collaborating with each school to assist those stakeholders in determining how they might implement Writing Enhanced pedagogical approaches.

Three examples illustrate the breadth and depth of the WAC initiative to foster effective instruction in writing.

## FIRST WRITING REQUIREMENT (FWR)

Since 2018, when the College implemented a universal First-Writing Requirement (FWR), the Writing and Rhetoric Program initiated several programmatic initiatives to strengthen the FWR courses and provide more pedagogical support for its instructors, both faculty and graduate student instructors. These include direct pedagogical training and supervision, instructor observation, syllabus review, and extensive mentoring of new graduate student instructors. To better align these pedagogical efforts with the curriculum of the FWR courses and to seize on the momentum created by the new WAC initiative, the Writing and Rhetoric Program created "Goals and Practices" guidelines in 2018. These new guidelines were reiterated across the program's various pedagogical initiatives. For example, starting in 2019-2020, the graduate pedagogy course, which is required of all graduate instructors teaching FWR courses,

emphasizes these Goals and Practices and uses them as a guide when graduate student instructors create their course syllabi and writing assignments.

The impact of these curricular changes is evident through a 2019 formative assessment of FWR instructors' confidence in teaching writing and instructors' use of recommended teaching practices. Sixty-one instructors taught 86 sections that spring semester. Instructors were surveyed early (re: confidence) and late (re: instruction) in the semester. Together, the two surveys addressed the recommended Goals and Practices. In response to the results of the confidence survey (completed by 63% of FWR instructors), the Writing and Rhetoric program director hosted a pedagogy panel devoted to "teaching for transfer." This approach to writing instruction emphasizes helping students recognize how to transfer what they learn in FWR courses to courses they will take in the future. "Teaching for transfer" is a foundation of the WAC initiative for curricular improvement. As such, this workshop was designed to implement more explicitly a WAC-supported pedagogical approach in the FWR courses.

Instructors were invited to complete a nine-item questionnaire concerning which instructional practices they implemented in their courses. Of the 55% of instructors responding, about nine in ten strongly agreed that their students completed at least three writing projects of roughly 1000-1500 words, had the opportunity to write in or out of class every week of the semester, had the opportunity to revise initial drafts of writing projects, and periodically engaged in self-evaluation and peer review. These four instructional practices are fundamental to the WAC/FWR curriculum.

In 2021, the Goals and Practices were updated to the current "Learning Goals in First-Year Writing At UVA,"<sup>8</sup> which adapted the previous guidelines into more explicit learning goals. These Learning Goals, like the previous guidelines, continue to serve as the backbone of FWR courses and pedagogical training and support initiatives.

## SECOND WRITING REQUIREMENT (SWR)

The College of Arts and Sciences directs an application process through which courses may be designated as SWR courses. For years, courses in the College only had to "be appropriate for development of writing skills, require two writing assignments totaling 20 pages or more, and have a student to instructor ratio of no more than 30 to 1" to qualify. In 2020, the College initiated a multi-year pilot course approval process through which course instructors could choose between the traditional criteria and the new set of criteria that defined the Writing Enhanced<sup>9</sup> model (Table 1).

**Table 1**

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<sup>8</sup> <https://writingrhetoric.as.virginia.edu/first-year-writing-courses-uva-goals-practices>

<sup>9</sup> <https://wac.virginia.edu/ongoing-pilot-we-criteria>

## Writing Criteria Comparison

<b>SWR Criteria</b>	<b>WE Criteria</b>
<p data-bbox="354 352 716 380"><i>*Pre-existing second writing requirement</i></p> <ol data-bbox="334 464 724 772" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="334 464 724 516">1. Be designated as appropriate for the development of writing skills;</li><li data-bbox="334 541 724 642">2. Have at least two writing assignments totaling 4,000 words (20 pages or more); <i>*Assignments must be written in English.</i> <i>*Blue books, quizzes and exams do not count.</i></li><li data-bbox="334 667 724 720">3. Have a student/instructor ratio no greater than 30/1;</li><li data-bbox="334 745 724 772">4. Be taught in the College of Arts &amp; Sciences.</li></ol>	<p data-bbox="805 352 1219 405"><i>*Writing-enhanced criteria, updated based on longitudinal, empirical evidence-based practice.</i></p> <ol data-bbox="792 436 1211 852" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="792 436 1211 510">1. One major learning objective for the course must be the development of student writing, which is reflected in the final course grade.</li><li data-bbox="792 510 1211 699">2. Multiple writing assignments are sequenced and distributed over the course of the semester.<ol data-bbox="808 562 1211 699" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="808 562 1211 657">a. Students should write a minimum of 15-20 double-spaced pages (or the equivalent in word-dominant multimodal projects), which may include both drafts and final versions of assignments.</li><li data-bbox="808 657 1211 699">b. Of this total, at least 10 double-spaced pages should be finished, polished writing.</li></ol></li><li data-bbox="792 699 1211 804">3. Students are required to revise at least 1 longer assignment based on feedback from the instructor and/or peers. This longer assignment should be developed through a multi-step drafting process.</li><li data-bbox="792 804 1211 852">4. The course provides writing instruction and repeated opportunities to discuss and practice writing.</li></ol>

Prior to participating in the pilot, instructors completed a survey in which they rated their confidence in 21 aspects of writing instruction. On the post-pilot survey, instructors were asked to reflect on the challenges of implementing the Writing Enhanced criteria and how the students in the course responded. Half of respondents reported no challenge to implementing Writing Enhanced criteria, and reflecting on their students' experience, participants felt that students responded well to the instruction. Between Fall 2019 and Spring 2022, across all eight undergraduate schools, 58 faculty piloted the Writing Enhanced criteria in 55 courses (60 total sections) in which 2,445 students were enrolled. Between Summer 2022 and Spring 2023, across all eight undergraduate schools, 53 faculty piloted the Writing Enhanced criteria in 48 courses (88 total sections) in which 1,285 students were enrolled.

### EXAMPLE: SCHOOL OF NURSING INITIATIVE—WRITING FOR LEARNING/WRITING FOR COMMUNICATION

Through individual audits of school resources and infrastructure, WAC created an adaptable suite of resources to support all undergraduate-serving schools to enrich writing in their respective curricula. Schools' engagement included individual consultation services, targeted workshops/training sessions, interdisciplinary pedagogy seminars, individual course pilots, student writing assessment, programming partnerships, and joint research. The most robust of these programs took place in the School of Nursing, which undertook an initiative to scaffold writing across the full four-year Bachelor of Nursing (BSN) program.

The BSN curriculum is designed to teach both general education and clinical competencies by the time students graduate. The School of Nursing curriculum committee initially had concluded that the time required to teach clinical skills in upper division courses prevented adequate attention to teaching students to write.

The School Learning Assessment (SLA) coordinator and the WAC director collaborated to assess the program's expectations for student writing and writing instruction and the experience of other schools of nursing in teaching writing. They reviewed the literature on writing instruction in BSN programs at nine other institutions, including descriptions of courses and assignments. They also analyzed the literature on applying WAC methods in nursing programs. Finally, they uncovered existing assignments that support students' proficiency in scientific writing.

They then collected internal data, reviewing samples of syllabi from all BSN classes, surveys of faculty confidence, assessments of student writing, and surveys of student perceptions of writing instruction. The SLA coordinator created a "map" of writing instruction across the BSN, identifying where writing instruction occurred and in what forms. The SLA coordinator and the WAC director then identified and scaffolded "building blocks" of writing instruction across students' four years, focusing on transfer across courses.

WAC directors collaborated with School of Nursing faculty and leaders to implement Writing Enhanced courses within their curricular goals. They provided presentations to nursing faculty on WAC principles and practices; tailored workshops; and one-on-one and small group consultations on curricula, course syllabi, and individual assignments. In addition, WAC Directors presented WAC principles to BSN students. In early 2022, WAC directors worked with faculty leaders to assess, document, and report on these efforts. In Fall 2022, the SON officially launched its BSN writing-enhanced curriculum.

Assessment of student writing in the BSN program will be ongoing as the faculty continues to adopt and refine curricula in their Writing Enhanced courses.

## WHAT FUTURE ACTIONS ARE PLANNED?

The Writing and Rhetoric Program (WRP)<sup>10</sup> will continue regular assessment of its FWR curriculum, particularly in light of the new Learning Goals. The WRP will also assess its directed self-placement process (launched in 2021), which is used by the College to place all incoming students in the appropriate FWR course.

The Writing Center<sup>11</sup> will continue to provide and assess one-to-one tutoring for undergraduate and graduate students across the University. The Writing Center will also develop new online writing resources (and refine existing resources) for students with a focus on writing in the disciplines and graduate-level

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<sup>10</sup> <https://writingrhetoric.as.virginia.edu/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://writingrhetoric.as.virginia.edu/welcome-writing-center>

writing and will develop and advertise a suite of workshops to classes and departments across the College and university.

WAC leadership plans to continue assessment of WE courses across the institution as a compass for directing ongoing programming and support. Building on existing assessment data that has shown which efforts demonstrate high efficacy, WAC will continue to:

- administer both the Faculty Seminar on the Teaching of Writing and the Graduate Instructor Seminar on the Teaching of Writing to further the integration of evidence-based writing pedagogy throughout disciplinary courses across UVA,
- work with individual schools and programs on faculty training and resource development,
- work with self-selecting schools on large-scale curricular scaffolding, and
- support the SWR Writing Enriched course implementation.

WAC is also building relationships with lateral partners to reach faculty and students through workshops and training. Most immediately, WAC has administered (with the UVA Center for Teaching Excellence) a series of workshops (half-day and multi-day) on writing pedagogy and generative AI. These workshops have seen participation from across the College and every School. In a separate project related by technology literacy, WAC has partnered with the CompEd Center (housed in the Computer Science department of the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences) to develop a “coding across the curriculum” workshop series, pairing evidence-based pedagogies on writing traditional prose with writing code.

## IN CLOSING

This methodologically integrated approach to assessment revealed substantial evidence of undergraduate students’ competency in written communication. Nearly seven in ten students are not just competent, but proficient in writing, a conclusion agreed upon both through the direct assessment of students’ papers (67% proficient or very proficient) and survey-based assessment of students’ self-assessments (71% very good or excellent). While survey respondents from underrepresented minority groups self-assessed at slightly lower levels of proficiency, some also showed notable rates of improvement. Survey respondents on average agreed that “teaching students to write is an important goal of the University,” that “my instructors care about how well I write,” and that “being able to write well is important to me.” Moreover, survey respondents agreed that they “are confident in their own ability to write well” and that they “know how to use drafting, revising, and editing to improve their writing.”

The University of Virginia promotes undergraduate competency in written communication. Students encounter instruction in writing throughout their undergraduate program of study. The curricula in the College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Engineering and Applied Science, and now in the School of Nursing are especially notable. The Writing Across the Curriculum initiative blended creation of new



pedagogical models; analysis of instructors' and students' perspectives; substantial and ongoing outreach to instructors, programs, and schools; and direct assessment of student writing to fulfill its mission to:

1. expand students' opportunities for writing across their academic careers,
2. increase students' writing proficiency,
3. deepen students' engagement with learning,
4. create a community of faculty actively engaged in the development of student writing through instruction and mentorship, and
5. foster a campus culture that supports writing.

As schools, academic programs, and individual instructors continue to pursue instructional pedagogy and content to improve students' writing, they demonstrate the broad and deep commitment to fostering students' writing proficiency at the University of Virginia.