School of Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences'
Writing (W) Course Policy

Introduction

The Academic Policy & Curriculum Committee (APCC) established guidelines for W courses, and divisions/majors need to identify courses as Ws. The policy below responds to these guidelines and the ongoing work of the tri-campus General Education W committee.

Policy

The W subcommittee proposed, and on February 27, 2024, Faculty Council adopted, a policy that

- Helps students fulfill a graduation requirement in a timely, rigorous, and meaningful way
- Supports faculty in teaching and developing W courses in their disciplines/majors through professional development opportunities
- Establishes 24 as the default enrollment limit for W courses
- Schedules W courses based on the needs of students in majors (more students in a major leads to more sections of W courses with that major's prefix)
- Ends the practice of awarding W credits on an ad hoc basis to whole courses that aren't officially designated as Ws
- Phases out the practice of awarding W credits on an ad hoc basis to individual students, establishing a formal petition process similar to how Incompletes are granted
- Requires divisions to submit a form for the IAS Curriculum Committee (ICC) describing majors' existing W courses and plans for creating new Ws or converting existing courses to Ws; this process is the one avenue for establishing courses as Ws

Background & Justification

- In 2018, APCC approved campus-wide [W guidelines](#) that task Schools with developing their own W policies. The Schools of Nursing & Healthcare Leadership and Social Work & Criminal Justice had adopted W policies, but the other Schools, including SIAS, had not.
- The W was designed (and the 2018 guidelines affirm this) to provide students with meaningful discipline-specific writing experiences – with academic and/or professional writing instruction related to their majors and taught by faculty with expertise in those majors.
- The 2018 guidelines do away with previous expectations that W courses require students to produce papers of a certain page count and similar universal requirements. Instead, they emphasize that students learn genres (types or forms of writing) relevant to their majors/disciplines with scaffolding that breaks large projects into smaller

assignments; receive meaningful feedback; have the opportunity to draft and revise their work; and find these expectations reflected in the course's learning objectives. These guidelines give faculty the autonomy to decide which genres are most relevant to their majors/disciplines and to determine rigor not based solely on page counts.

● Our policy supports faculty in enacting the 2018 guidelines by providing professional development and other assistance, such as W courses receiving priority for embedded tutors from the Writing Center; lowering course caps to make the workload of reading and commenting on student writing manageable; scheduling courses to meet the needs of students in that major; awarding the W on a course-basis so students can better plan their graduation pathways; and creating a level of curriculum review that is standard when applying for a course designation.

Funding

● The dean's office has determined that, in our current enrollment environment, SIAS can offer W course sections at 24 students sufficient to meet student demand without significant additional expenditures. Costs estimated at $30K will arise from lowering the caps in TPSYCH 209 and 309, and TBIOMD 310, which serve a large number of majors and have an established cap of 30. (See Appendix B for more details).

● In the short term, these costs can be made available through careful student-demand responsive reallocation of instructional resources arising from sabbaticals, leaves, and buyouts. In the longer term, strategic hiring requests should help us meet student demand with the lower caps.

● In both the short and long term, chairs and their scheduling team will be critical to ensuring that the appropriate number of W courses are offered.

Appendices

● Appendix A: Form for W courses for divisions to review and send to ICC
● Appendix B: Tables showing the number of current W seats per students in majors; how students in each major are receiving their Ws; and the costs associated with lowering course caps to 24
● Appendix C: Individual ad hoc W credits request form, modeled after the SIAS Incomplete petition form