

WAC IN THE SCHOOLS

ANISFIELD SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

BUSINESS WRITING ACROSS THE CORE

Submitted to WAC Committee by Teresa Hutchins, January 23, 2012 and Revised by
ASB School Assessment Committee (SAC) September 1, 2015

Charge: The intent of this document is to describe the writing program in the Anisfield School of Business. It will describe the genesis, the structure, the goals, the accomplishments, and the current status of the program.

Brief Background: In 2006 the college WAC program was in limbo. The WAC graduation requirements were suspended as a result of institutional and curricular changes, and the future of the program was unclear. Since the business school was in candidacy for AACSB accreditation, the faculty in the business school decided to move forward with a writing program. The initial goal was for students to prepare well written business documents. This learning goal was delivered in three courses in the business core. Each of these classes conformed to the requirements of Writing Intensive classes as set by the College.

Conception of Business Writing Across the Core: Written communication was first assessed in spring 2008 in a three hundred level class, and those results were discussed in a faculty assessment retreat. Four conclusions were reached: 1) students exhibited a modest grasp of the mechanics of writing, and a deficient mastery of the rhetoric of writing, 2) students had little proficiency in the concise style of business writing, 3) faculty assigned conventional writing assignments while the learning goal was to write business documents and 4) individual faculty who had responsibility for delivering a class for which writing was a learning goal felt overburdened. Consequently the Teaching Assessment and Program (TAP) committee decided to take a new approach to fulfilling the Written Communication learning goal. Rather than having three classes responsible for delivering this objective, it was decided to adopt a writing across the core approach for the business school. This program, Business Writing Across the Core (BWAC), which is in keeping with the liberal arts tradition and the writing across the curriculum program of the College, embeds writing assignments in ten of the core classes and focuses on five business documents. Instruction would be more intentional and the work load among the faculty would be diffused.

Timeline for Business Writing Across the Core: The BWAC program was adopted in 2009, and implemented in fall 2009. The unit agreed to revote on continuing the program after the first BWAC assessment in 2011.

Defining Business Writing Rhetoric: In the business school we define rhetoric in the classical manner of “bringing forth an argument”. It is a method of analysis and a means for framing the discourse of discussion. Our students are instructed in the tools and

techniques for analyzing and solving organizational problems, and we expect them to utilize these tools in support of their arguments. The document driven program is really a method for instructing our students in the discourse conventions used in business. Very often in business, professionals are expected to analyze a situation and make a recommendation. A unifying theme in all five of the documents is problem solving. The elements of this rhetoric are: articulating the issue, identifying stakeholders, carrying out analysis using best practice techniques, drawing implications from analysis, recommending an action and supporting the recommendation.

Description of the Program: The following table identifies the five documents and the core classes in which they will be assigned. The five documents have not changed since the initial inception of the program, but the classes in which each is delivered has changed as a result of faculty input. Although a business case is not a specific document written by professionals it was included, since it is assigned in graduate school and it is a meaningful technique for organizing thoughts. Each document is assigned first at the 100/200 level and again in a 300/400 level. This vertical design allows students to have two experiences in crafting each document, and to therefore hone their rhetorical skills in a more sophisticated manner. Since the dynamic of rhetoric is the interplay among speakers, audience, form and message, the five different documents give the student experience in multiple means of communication. The following table illustrates the program:

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<u>DOCUMENT</u>	LETTER	MEMO	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	PROPOSAL	BUSINESS CASE
Conceptual Distinction	External document conveying information to unfamiliar audience	Internal document providing information, or requesting information	Summary of a larger document or project which may contain technical information	Persuasive document to outside audience	Extensive analysis of a business issue, which provides a recommendation
Introductory class	Business Law	Microeconomics	Managerial Accounting	Principles of Information Technology	Marketing Principles and Practices
Advanced class	Ethics in Business and Computer Law and Ethics	Corporate Finance	International Business Category	Operations Management	Managing Organizational Behavior

Goal of the program: The goals of the BWAC program are as follows:

- To educate students in the style of business communication, which emphasizes conciseness and prioritizing;
- To instruct students in the method of business rhetoric which highlights identifying an issue, applying best practice business models to offer recommendations and supporting those recommendations with persuasive argument and information;
- To inform students of the types of business writing genres which address different business problems, styles and audience awareness;
- To provide instruction in five specific business documents.

Guidelines: The BWAC program is structured such that the document assigned to each class is relevant to the content of the class. In addition each document is assigned at the one or two hundred level and again at the three or four hundred level. At the introductory level we expect to see two opportunities for each document or one opportunity with some significant pre-writing exercise. It should also be noted that most of the classes at the introductory level are regularly filled to capacity of thirty-five students. At the advanced level we expect to see a process for constructing the document and opportunity for students to revise. These classes tend to have a maximum capacity of twenty-five to thirty.

Support and Professional Development for BWAC: Since the inception of the new writing program a number of workshops and presentations have been conducted to support the program. They were:

1. The first was in June 2009 and it was conducted by Dr. Hutchins. The title of the in-service session was BWAC Writing to Think. The purpose of the session was to clarify the requirements of the BWAC program, to provide a template for each document, to provide suggestions of assignments to motivate the use of each document and to provide time to brainstorm topics for each document.
2. The second session was in February 2010. During the in-service six faculty members made presentations on their initial experience with BWAC. The sessions covered such concepts as:
 - Preparing students for an assignment
 - Choosing workable topics for students
 - Identifying correct tone and style
 - Integrating quantitative analysis with text
 - Differentiating synthesis from repetitiveness
 - Managing the work load for instructors
3. Dr. Hutchins presented a paper entitled “Closing the Loop in Written Communication: Business Writing Across the Core” at the annual AACSB assessment conference in March 2010. The session resulted in a number of interesting observations and suggestions, which were discussed in the Unit.

4. The Unit began development of an ASB web resource to provide information for faculty. The resource site within Luminis is still a work in progress but the infrastructure for each of the five business documents is there. For each document the site provides a handout of key points, examples of assignments, examples of student work, academic articles on business writing pedagogy and examples of the documents.
5. Through the largess of a Foundation Grant the Unit was able to bring in Dr. Chris Anson from North Carolina State University to conduct a writing workshop in April of 2010. Three themes were developed: linking the writing assignment to the learning goals of the class, examining the difference and effect of low stakes vs high stakes writing assignments, and constructing a process for writing with appropriate points for faculty intervention.

Assessment: The first post BWAC assessment was conducted in spring, 2011. Two documents were assessed. Eighty-nine Proposals from Operations Management and fifty-one Memos from Corporate Finance were assessed. The assessment was done by the entire business faculty and each piece of student work had two evaluators. The unit used Clarity, Mechanics, Organization and Style as the four traits with a target proficiency of eighty percent in the excellent and acceptable category. Clarity and Organization exceeded the target with Mechanics and Style falling short at 77% and 65% respectively. Most interesting, however was a comparison of the pre and post BWAC results for a Memo. The memo was used since it was the best comparison to the document that was used in 2008. The results were encouraging. Student work improved in three of the four categories:

Percentage of Student Work in Acceptable and Excellent Category

Trait	2008	2011
Clarity	66	84
Mechanics	80	78
Organization	70	80
Style	64	77

The results of the writing assessment were discussed at the bi-annual assessment retreat held in June 2011. Based on those discussions, the Unit accepted the following closing the loop suggestions for writing in September, 2011:

- The ASB faculty will continue to raise the standard on student writing. In an effort to engage students to do their best work, consequences for poor writing are suggested. The faculty will determine appropriate actions for poor Written Communication skills (e.g., handing back student work ungraded, zeros on assignments, etc). This will ensure that there is a consistency of message across all courses concerning the importance of Written Communication skills.
- Faculty should provide feedback to the students on their writing and allow them the opportunity to re-write or practice on additional assignments.

- Faculty are encouraged to provide more detailed instructions for students since there is frequently a correlation between the level of detail given in the instructions and the quality of the students' work. Some feel we should have a school-wide requirement for writing to take the punitive aspect out of the instructor's bailiwick.
- TAP will explore ways to best utilize the Center for Reading and Writing as well as the potential for packaging the Course Enrichment Components (CEC) of several courses to work on business writing.
- The Unit also discussed using uniform proofing symbols.

Current Status: The unit reaffirmed its adoption of the BWAC program, and the next assessment is scheduled for spring, 2013.