The University of Hawaii at Hilo Faculty Senate approved a Writing Intensive graduation requirement for College of Arts and Sciences students effective August 1995. As stated in the UH-Hilo catalog, the Writing Intensive (WI) Program is part of a “systemwide movement to incorporate more writing in courses from all disciplines,” not just in English/Writing courses. The criteria for designating a course as WI includes the following:

1. Writing encourages learning course/content materials.
2. At least some of the writing done in the course utilizes the process approach (i.e. allows multiple drafts).
3. A significant percentage of the course grade is derived from the writing assignments.
4. Students produce a minimum of 16 typed pages of finished prose over the course of the semester. Ideally, students should be assigned a variety of assignments as opposed to a single research paper only.
5. A WI class is restricted to not more than 20 students.

These criteria are observed system-wide. In general, these criteria also mimic other WI programs nationwide. The one difference between the UH system WI requirements and others is the length of finished prose required. In the UH system, a minimum of 16 typed pages of finished prose are required. Several programs stipulate a minimum of 20 typed pages.

Students admitted since 1995 to UH-Hilo must take two WI courses. Students admitted since 1996 must take three WI courses. In both situations, at least one WI course must be at the upper-division level. (Students who transferred in as juniors or seniors had fewer WI requirements to fulfill.)

The philosophy behind WI (sometimes also known as Writing Across the Curriculum/WAC) begins with an assumption that writing is central to the academic experience regardless of the discipline. Writing is then used as a tool for both communication and learning. In particular, writing is a tool to help students become familiar with and practiced in writing in their own disciplines.

In WI courses, students are expected to write more than in non-WI courses. It is important to note, however, that not all the writing produced in WI classes should or needs to be graded by the instructor. Rather, it is hoped that students will be assigned a series of sequenced writing assignments that establish links between informal and formal writing situations within their discipline. The student/writer’s experience should be enhanced by opportunities to use peer learning, collaboration, and feedback from peers and faculty.
ASSESSMENT PROJECT STATEMENT

This WI Assessment project was part of a pilot project intended to lay the groundwork for a larger assessment plan for the General Education Program and graduation requirements.

I was asked to try to address numerous issues since the WI Program has not been formally assessed since it went into effect in 1995. My accomplishments on this project are detailed in the following pages of this report.

Ultimately, I offer a set of broad recommendations on what we can begin to do to accomplish a comprehensive assessment of the Program, which must include assessment of student learning outcomes.

Some Facts about the WI Program

1. A total of 587 WI classes have been offered at UH-Hilo since August 1995. (See Appendix A for a complete semester list.)

2. Each Division/School has regularly offered WI courses since 1995. Some departments have either not offered any WI courses or have not done so in many semesters or years. A review of the WI course list received from the Records Office indicates the following departments have apparently never offered a WI course:

   - Art
   - Astronomy
   - Dance
   - Engineering
   - Health and Physical Education
   - Mathematics
   - Music

3. No formal assessment of the WI Program has been done since 1995. This includes no assessment of student outcomes.

4. The College of Hawaiian Language faculty strongly encourage their students to complete the same number of WI requirements as their student counterparts in CAS. It is not, however, a formal requirement. Discussion about the possibility of making WI a graduation requirement for that college will be taking place between Dr. Kalena Silva, Director, and myself.
Writing Intensive Survey Results

No formal assessment of the WI program has been attempted until Spring 2001. This is why one of my major goals was to construct the first WI survey to elicit several pieces of information from faculty and staff. The web-based survey was designed with assistance from UH-H Professor Theresa Conefrey, UH-Manoa Writing Program Specialist Monica Stitt-Bergh, and UH-H Webmaster Sunny Walker. (See Appendix B for a copy of the survey and results from surveys received through May 16.) Although the survey was interrupted by the faculty strike, I did receive 33 responses. I will highlight some of the findings.

Of the 33 people who responded by May 16:

1. The number of people who have taught WI courses since 1995 is 31.
2. The number of people who have never taught WI courses was three.
3. The response to the question “What kinds of writing assignments do you give students?” elicited at least one response for each of 15 types offered. I have listed each of the choices, in descending order of frequency of response.

- Research Reports/Papers (26)
- Analysis (16)
- Reaction Papers (16)
- Essays (15)
- Essay Exams, in class (13)
- Essay Exams, take home (12)
- Journal (11)
- Proposals (10)
- Abstract/Precis/Exec. Summary (9)
- Critique (9)
- Freewriting (7)
- Report (6)
- Field Observation Notes (4)
- Learning Log (4)
- Lab Report (3)

4. Two people surveyed indicated they did not give students any opportunity to revise papers. This is a serious issue of concern since the ability to revise at least some assignments is one of the most critical elements in a writing intensive course.

Based on these responses, it appears that many students’ writing activity still revolves around one major paper, the research paper. Although the WI application form has been revised to encourage faculty to assign students a range of different assignments, the survey results indicate that many faculty continue to rely on one or two major writing assignments.
A related concern is whether students are receiving adequate opportunities to revise their work. Again, it was especially disturbing to see two people indicate students have no revision opportunities. Several faculty also wrote that students only have a combination of essay exams (take-home and in-class) plus a research project to fulfill the WI criteria. Since exams traditionally do not include revision opportunities, it is possible that students are able to revise only their research project. This situation is not in keeping with the spirit of WI.

As a result of this information from the survey, I recognize that more must be done to encourage faculty to consider adopting other writing assignments and incorporating these into their future WI courses.

Other results from the survey will be discussed in different sections of this report.

Additional Sources of Information About WI/WAC Programs

I was able to identify several helpful sources of information about WI or WAC programs that proved interesting and helpful to my assessment project.

My review of several programs nationwide reaffirmed UH-Hilo’s WI program bears strong similarity to other programs. See Appendix C for a brief list of other colleges and universities that have a WI or WAC program in place.

One program in particular proved very useful. This is the Georgia State University site which includes information about both the WI program as well as information on assessment procedures. The website address for GSU is http://www.gsu.edu/webfs01/eng/wwwwac/public_html/.

Another useful site is the Assessment Resources page of the American Association for Higher Education located at http://www.aahe.org/assessment/assess_links.htm. (See Appendix D.) Those items I found useful are highlighted.

A vital source of information was the 4 Cs Position Statement on Writing Assessment located at http://www.nete.org/ccc/12/sub/states6.html. This statement addresses several concerns related to assessment of writing. It also provides guidelines for students, faculty, administrators and higher education governing boards, and legislators. (See Appendix E.) This statement can be the foundation on which future writing assessment activities are based on. Of particular importance is the following statement from that document:

Assessments of written literacy should be designed and evaluated by well-informed current or future teachers of students being assessed, for purposes clearly understood by all participants; should elicit from student writers a variety of pieces, preferably over a period of time; should encourage and reinforce good teaching practices; and should be solidly grounded in the latest research on language and learning.
Rubrics

I was also able to obtain samples of different rubrics used for assessment purposes. It should be noted that prevailing thought is all rubrics are controversial and often inconsistent. It is important to understand that no one rubric can or should be applied to every program or situation. A rubric should be carefully crafted and applied to a specific program rather than applied to all programs. At the very least, any rubric designed to assess UH-Hilo programs should distinguish between different divisions. Thus, a rubric used in the Natural Sciences Division should not be applied to the Humanities Division without some modification or revision.

Additionally, a one-size-fits-all rubric should not necessarily be applied to any and all student learning outcome situations. Since different programs place emphasis on different student outcomes, any rubric assessing these outcomes must also be carefully crafted and revised.

I have included in Appendix F sample rubrics. Each is labeled accordingly. The GSU Analytic Assessment Guide identifies broadly stated categories. The GSU rubric is within the accompanying Curriculum Assessment Project Report. The Kapiolani CC rubric represents a completely different approach, highly detailed and specific. It should be noted, however, that the KCC rubric is not intended for use as is for every situation being assessed. According to Shel Hershinow, KCC Professor of Language Arts and co-designer of the rubric, users are encouraged to identify those categories most applicable to their program’s individual situations.

UH-H faculty and staff could use these examples to design rubrics for their own use after they have identified clear outcomes and populations for assessment.

Portfolios as an Assessment Tool

One assessment method for writing outcomes that would provide a comprehensive body of information is the portfolio approach. UH-H already possesses a significant body of writing samples from almost each student who enrolled at UH-H since August 1995.* Their writing placement exam (WPE) could be used as the first of several samples of writing to construct a portfolio for review. In addition to their WPE, students could be asked to submit sample(s) of their writing from selected general education courses and again during their senior year from a senior seminar or other capstone course in their major.

(*NOTE: There are no placement exams for students who fulfilled their 100-level English/ESL requirement through transfer credit.)

To carry out this assessment method, we could develop a rubric to review these portfolios in addition to identifying and training faculty and/or staff willing to review portfolios.
The portfolio assessment could be used to identify:

- Student learning outcomes
- The effectiveness of the General Education Program
- The effectiveness of curriculum for majors/programs

These portfolios could be traditional paper or electronic based. Dr. Tom Hilgers, Manoa Writing Program Director, will be conducting an electronic portfolio workshop on our campus this coming fall semester. (This workshop was originally scheduled for April 2001, but was postponed due to the faculty strike.)

**Recommendations**

I have subdivided this section into several areas, the WI Committee, faculty, WI students, and administration. For each category I have provided suggestions on how to strengthen and improve the WI Program.

**Writing Intensive Committee:**

The most appropriate place to begin is with the WI Committee members. Each division from CAS identifies a faculty member willing to serve on the WI Committee. This person represents his or her division by soliciting division faculty to apply for the WI designation each semester, reviews applications, and acts as a resource person to her or his division members on WI matters.

This works in theory, but has had limited success in practice. In reality, the WI Committee members are largely self-taught in their approach to WI and receive no formal or regular training in what WI means, how to evaluate applications, how to assist their faculty, etc. It also appears that serving on the WI Committee does not count as a formal indication of service to the division or college. The people who serve on this committee, however, are genuinely concerned about helping students improve their writing and gain a better understanding of the fields they intend to pursue additional studies or career opportunities in.

As pointed out by one of the survey respondents, “Little has been done by the WI Committee other than screen sylabbae (sic). No one ever checks on learning outcomes.” This is an accurate statement. None of the WI Committee members receives release time or other compensation and recognition to carry out any other WI related activities. The time they spend on WI related matters is squeezed in between their teaching, research, and other service. If the WI Program is to be strengthened and improved, we must begin with the committee members first.

To encourage faculty to serve on this committee and help them provide greater assistance to their colleagues, there should be periodic training sessions for on-coming and current WI members. These training sessions can be as brief as several one- to two-hour workshops on different topics or one or two half-day workshops with stipends. Additionally, there should be formal recognition of service on this committee included in reappointment, tenure, and promotion criteria.
**Faculty**

The faculty who teach WI courses are the ones who have the greatest impact on the students and, ultimately, the program. This makes it essential to have faculty who clearly understand what WI means, how their courses can be modified to fulfill the WI expectations, and how they can help students achieve better understanding of the course content and improved writing skills.

This is an achievable task if the following can be provided, at a minimum:

- Develop a resource center for faculty use. This resource center could be housed temporarily in the current Writing Center location. Items to include should be,
  - texts, articles, etc. that help explain, suggest, and provide examples of what WI is
  - samples of effectively written WI applications from various divisions/departments
  - sample WI assignments, those that worked well and those that did not, with comments, from instructors
  - sample student assignments that illustrate varying levels of work (good to poor), also with comments from instructor

- Provide faculty with regular opportunities to meet with a variety of people including:
  - skilled WI practitioners from outside of our campus who would share their knowledge and expertise with other faculty
  - UH-H faculty willing to share their assignments, strategies, etc with their colleagues
  - others who can suggest ways to design assignments, evaluate writing more efficiently, etc.

  NOTE: Several survey respondents indicated their interest in attending one- to two-hour workshops that demonstrated teaching strategies, designing discipline specific writing assignments, etc.

- Ask WI faculty to complete a brief self-assessment of each of their WI classes at the end of each semester.

- Provide training opportunities for those faculty interested in reviewing portfolios

**Students Enrolled in WI Classes:**

Students who are enrolled in WI classes must be one of the first to be assessed in relation to learning outcomes. The two most important outcomes to identify are whether
or not students are more effectively learning content and improving their writing skills. Faculty could begin to gather a body of information by:

- Having students identify, at the beginning of the semester, their own expectations for a WI class (This should include a statement of goals, large and small.)

- Having students complete an additional survey or evaluation of their WI experience at the end of the semester

- Tracking student performance in non-WI and WI courses

- Having students develop a portfolio for assessment which includes a detailed self-assessment statement

**Administrative Support:**

The one suggestion voiced many times by several survey respondents was the need to formally recognize the efforts of those who serve on the WI Committee and those who plan for and teach WI courses. Suggestions ranged from providing stipends, release time, and recognizing WI related activities in reappointment, tenure, and promotion applications.

Stipends need not be costly, especially since several faculty are interested in short training sessions. There are also several knowledgeable personnel in the UH system who could be called upon to share their expertise in WI, assessment activities, portfolios, etc. I have spoken with a few of these people who are interested and willing to do short presentations on our campus.

As for the suggestion involving reappointment, tenure, and promotion activities, I have included in Appendix G, a copy of part of UH-Manoa’s Criteria and Guidelines for Faculty Tenure/Promotion Application (September 2000). Highlighted in this document are specific references to an applicant’s WI activities. The first reference comes under the Supporting Materials section. As stated in the document, “Contributions to the curriculum may be documented by…materials you have taught as writing intensive…” (This is only one of several suggestions offered to the applicant.) The second reference to WI comes under Part III, Section D – List of Courses Taught. Here the applicant is asked to specifically identify those courses that were taught as WI.

Additionally, information about the WI program should be disseminated to all faculty on a regular basis through the Faculty Handbook, new faculty orientation, and the general advising meeting each semester.
Conclusion

Because the Writing Intensive Program has not been assessed since 1995, much work needs to be done. This review can be done in increments over a period of time or someone could be assigned to perform a comprehensive assessment of the program. The latter would require this person to work almost full-time on this project for longer than one semester. If that level of commitment is not practical or possible, then a series of activities should be initiated over a period of several semesters.

Some clerical assistance should be given to an assessment project of this nature. Minimally, this could take the form of a regular student-assistant.

Writing intensive faculty at UH-Hilo are generally observing the spirit of WI, but there are areas that need strengthening. This can best be accomplished through the collective efforts of students, faculty, staff, and administrators.