

Writing Across the Business Curriculum: An Exploration of Writing Intensive Courses and Writing Fellows Programs

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ABSTRACT

The importance of writing skills to the business student learning experience, the job-seeking graduate and the discerning employer is well documented and systemically ignored. The literature continually provides metrics on business school graduates and their deficient writing skills. The authors categorize and differentiate the strengths and deficiencies in writing skill acquisition across the college business curriculum. The literature review summarizes employer priorities and business school learning outcomes, writing intensive courses across all disciplines, and the winning advantage of a curriculum utilizing writing fellows and writing centers.

Further, field data was collected at two east coast colleges highlighting implementation and integration details. The assessment shows positive attitudes by both faculty favoring an in-class focus as well as students favoring out-of-class writing support.

INTRODUCTION

Most researchers agree that the importance of business writing skills to the business student, business school graduate and employer cannot be underestimated. Employers need graduates who possess exceptional writing skills in order to help the organization achieve its goals (Business Writing Skills, 2009).

The ability to write “opens doors to professional employment.” In addition, people who cannot write and communicate will not be hired or considered for promotion. One respondent cited that, “writing ability could be your ticket in . . . or it could be your ticket out” (Writing Skills Necessary for Employment, Says Big Business, 2004). Not only are excellent writing skills important for graduates who plan to work for medium-to-large organizations, but they are also important to those who plan to own their own business. Small business owners are highly likely to engage in a great deal of verbal and written communication (The Importance of Writing Skills for Small Business Owners, 2008).

Business does not function in a vacuum. College graduates will need to communicate both internally and externally, nationally and internationally. According to Davies & Birbili (2000), “Few organizations exist which possess neither customers, nor superiors, nor boards of directors, who will not require written records, reports or customer / client-oriented material, such as letters, pamphlets or promotional literature.” Graduates will be required to possess both written and oral communication skills.

Importance to Business

Verbal, written and interpersonal skills are more valuable now than they were even five years ago (Messmer, 2007). The ability to communicate topped the list of recruiting companies' desired traits among college candidates, according to the National Association of Colleges & Employers' 2006 Job Outlook. As a result, 80% or more of the companies in the services and the finance, insurance, and real estate (FIRE) sectors, assess writing during hiring (Writing Skills Necessary for Employment, Says Big Business, 2004).

The amount of time that white collar workers are required to write on the job should be noted. During the past six years the amount of written documents that have crossed the desk of the average worker has increased by 600 percent (Business Writing Skills, 2009). According to McEwen (2003), white collar workers spend an estimated 20% of their work schedule on writing. Over fifty percent of respondents in the *Work Skills in Britain Survey* reported that “writing long documents figured prominently” in their work (Davies & Birbili, 2000). The National Commission on Writing (2004) noted that two-thirds of salaried employees in large American companies have some writing responsibility. A 2006 Canadian study revealed that “58 percent of Canadian workers spend 2-4 hours per day reading written text (emails, reports, memos, intra/internet)” (Hansen, n.d.). The 2004 National Commission on Writing reported that “technical reports (59 percent), formal reports (62 percent), and memos and correspondence (70 percent)” were written on a regular basis. They also indicated that people who cannot write and communicate clearly will not be hired and are unlikely to last long enough to be considered for promotion.

Technology has also changed the business writing dynamic. According to Davies & Birbili (2000), “Writing is becoming ever more central and crucial to the world of work, with computers on every desk, email and the internet adding to the world’s written words in almost epidemic proportions.”

According to Hansen (n.d.), given the relative informality of e-mail, its ubiquity is a major reason writing skills have become so crucial. E-mail is so frequently used to communicate in the workplace that “unclear, garbled, poorly written e-mails waste time, money, and productivity.”

With so much business taking place today via email, business writing skills have become even more important. When people rely on email as a communication tool in their daily business interactions, the way that they write will affect the decisions of prospective customers as to whether or not they choose to do business with them (The Importance of Writing Skills for Small Business Owners, 2008).

The Bad News

It is no secret that the writing skills of business graduates have been considered below par by employers for quite some time. According to Quible & Griffin (2007), both business professionals and instructors often view writing skills as “one of the most important qualifications that employees should possess.” However, the authors found that “many business employees, including recent college graduates, have serious writing deficiencies, especially in their ability to use standard English.”

Several studies have been conducted to measure employer satisfaction with writing skills of college graduates. In general, the satisfaction rate is unsatisfactory. Gordon (2006) concluded that undergraduates enter and leave business school programs “without the basic knowledge needed to write effectively, which can hinder their academic and job success.” A 2006 study of a group of large employers by a consortium of business and literacy groups found that while written communication “ranked at or near the top of a list of skills required in a wide range of jobs”, one-quarter of the respondents indicated that “new entrants with a four-year college degree are deficient in written communication and basic English skills.” The respondents also indicated that both high school and college graduates “fell short in basic grammar and more advanced skills such as writing effective memos” (Hendricks, 2007).

Another study conducted by Paranto & Kelkar (1999) investigated employers’ perceptions of 18 business communication skills and found that “the lowest level of satisfaction [was] with written communication skills.” A 2004 study done by the National Commission on Writing, reported that corporations expressed “a fair degree of dissatisfaction” with the writing of recent college graduates. They concluded that “academic styles of writing” were “unsuited to workplace needs” (The National Commission on Writing, 2004).

In an interview with a public relations agency recruiting manager, Gordon (2006) discovered that not only do undergraduate business hires have weak writing skills, but that they also “do not understand the difference between formal and informal writing.”

According to Davies & Birbili (2000), “despite the recognition by employers of the importance and difficulty of workplace writing, relatively little priority is actually accorded to this issue.” Another recent study that surveyed over 400 human resource officials concluded that, “The future workforce is here, and it is ill-prepared.” (Most Young People Entering the U.S. Workforce Lack Critical Skills Essential for Success, 2006). As a result, American firms may spend as much as \$3.1 billion annually to remediate their employees’ writing deficiencies (The National Commission on Writing, 2004).

Quible & Griffin (2007) found that employee’s writing deficiencies come with intangible costs as well. They include; “image degradation” for both employees and employers; “negative impact on productivity” when employees must revisit poorly written documents to ascertain the intended meaning; and the “outcome when an incorrect decision is made” because of poorly written documentation.

Given the amount of time that employees are required to spend writing, the tangible and intangible costs to business are not surprising. According to the National Commission on Writing (2004), two-thirds of salaried workers in large U.S. companies have jobs that require writing. The study described writing as a “threshold skill” for employee selection and promotion, and that it has become critical to be able to convey content in a “tight, logical, direct manner.” The most

sought-after skills are “accuracy, clarity, spelling, punctuation, grammar, and conciseness” (Hansen, n.d.).

The Good News: Writing Programs That Can Help: Writing Across the Curriculum, Writing in the Disciplines, Writing Intensive Courses, and Writing Fellows Programs

Writing Across the Curriculum

Many colleges and universities are addressing writing skills deficiencies through various initiatives. The Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), Writing in the Disciplines (WID) and Writing Intensive (WI) movements continue to expand in institutions of higher education since their emergence in the 1970s. Early WAC programs varied in form, funding, and size and similar to WAC programs today operated from the premise that the teaching of writing is the responsibility of the entire academic community, that writing must be continuous over the four years of the undergraduate experience and across the disciplines (“Clearinghouse”, 2009). The majority of WAC programs focus on two central objectives: facilitating workshops designed to support interdisciplinary faculty on the implementation of effective writing practices in their courses, and for faculty from English or writing departments to introduce composition students to the varying types of writing performed across the disciplines (Bazerman & Russell, 1994). In addition, McLeod and Maimon (2000) state that, “WAC is a pedagogical reform movement that presents an alternative to the ‘delivery of information’ model of teaching in higher education, to lecture classes and to multiple-choice, true/false testing” (p. 579). As an alternative to what Freire (1970) coined “the banking model” of education, WAC functions to promote student engagement, to deepen critical thinking and learning, and to allow disciplinary faculty to “get inside the learning process in new ways” (Anson, 2002). In support of this learning process WAC programs commonly include the following intertwined elements: faculty development, curricular components, student support by way of a writing center and/or writing fellows program, assessment, and administrative structure and budget (McLeod & Maimon, 2000).

Despite WAC’s success as an emerging disciplinary field, an increasing body of research, experience, and institutional support, complaints about student writing inside and outside the academy persist. Such complaints, however, are nothing new. Literacy crises have long been a part of our national narrative starting in the 1870s and reemerging again in the 1910s, the late 1940s, the mid 1970s, and again in the wake of the 21st century (Russell, 2004). The 1970s crisis entered the mainstream media when *Newsweek*’s cover story, “Why Johnny Can’t Write” made the claim that, “willy-nilly, the U.S. educational system is spawning a generation of semi-literates” (58). While the word “crisis” has yet to enter the current debate, research indicates that instructors, policy makers, and employers are *deeply concerned*. Bartlett (2003) writes in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that Princeton, Duke University, Columbia University, Brown University and Bowdoin College recognize that they are failing to teach students to write and that the students themselves are dissatisfied even though “it’s hard to find a college president or liberal-arts dean who can’t give a solemn, impromptu lecture on the subject.” In *the Journal of Education for Business* Quible and Griffin (2007), who both share interest in business writing, insist that college graduates “have serious writing deficiencies, especially in their ability to use standard English.”

What is generally accepted in the rhetoric, composition, and literacy fields is that literacy crises and the national attention they receive typically coincide with demographic shifts in the admission of previously excluded populations (Bazerman & Russell, 1994). Current trends in immigration, globalization, as well as the growing number of non-traditional learners are changing the face of higher education. Students from these previously marginalized communities join the ranks of other historical waves of demographic change including the conception of progressive education in the 1890s, the advent of open admissions, and returning post WWII GIs. In this context it comes as little surprise that the “Why Johnny Can’t Write” theme has reemerged in interdisciplinary scholarship (MacDonald, 1995; Bartlett, 2003). According to Carroll, (2002) “when professors assign ‘writing’ and students are unsuccessful, professors may assume that students don’t know ‘how to write’, where in fact, students are being asked to complete increasingly complex and disciplinary-specific “literacy tasks,” which professors may be unable or unwilling to articulate (pgs. 129-30). Davies and Birbili (2000) suggest that it is unlikely for employers to provide instruction or training in the metacognitive or conceptual knowledge needed for professional writing.

In response researchers from disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields are currently working to explore issues pertaining to improving the writing of one diverse group of learners. Russell (1994) notes that institutional and public responses commonly marshal “back to the basics” rhetoric including a call for remediation, and renewed focus on skill and drill pedagogies. Quible and Griffin (2007) support this view and warn that “without such [grammatical] instruction, businesses will continue to suffer the high costs of a lost generation of employees whose writing is plagued with sentence-level deficiencies.” Harris and Smith (1992) counter that successful WAC programs are those who have “moved from writing crisis management in the direction of curricular change” noting in particular that 1) student writing suffers when not reinforced following freshman composition and 2) that student writing improves significantly when done within the context of their major.

Writing in the Disciplines

Writing in the Disciplines (WID) is a component of WAC that focuses on the writing genre conventions of a particular discipline. MacDonald (1994) makes the distinction that WID should resemble “expert insider prose.” While students may engage in various types of writing during the semester, a typical WID assignment is a formal paper or papers that adhere to format and style guidelines typical of the professional papers they are helping students learn about. Teachers comment primarily on the substance of these assignments, but teachers also expect students to meet professional standards of layout and proofreading (format and mechanical correctness). (“Clearinghouse”, 2009).

McEwen (2003) insists that business faculty must share in the responsibility of teaching students discipline specific prose by increasing writing opportunities; moreover, he specifies that the responsibility of teaching students disciplinary writing is not the sole responsibility of business communication faculty. One study conducted at the City University of New York’s Baruch College’s Weissman Center for International Business concluded that faculty did not offer enough opportunities for students to write and receive instruction with three respondents offering no writing at all. In addition many of the faculty respondents felt that teaching writing skills was the sole responsibility of the English or Writing faculty (Warner, 2008). Consultants

from the Baruch College's Bernard L. Schwartz Communication Institute disagreed stating that the freshman composition course would not "be enough to prepare students for the next three years in college or, more importantly, for the world of work that they would encounter when they graduated" (Warner, 2008).

Writing Intensive Initiatives

Boice (1994) reports that faculty resistance to increasing writing opportunities, disciplinary or otherwise, stems from five concerns: increased work load, already packed classroom time, student dislike of increased workload, lack of writing expertise, and a lack of enjoyment in writing themselves. Students showed similar resistance to writing intensive formats when surveyed with responses such as "What does this have to do with organizations?" and "I'm not good at this!" (Boice, 1994). For faculty, preparing students to communicate without fear for "real world" demands and covering course content presents challenges. However, according to Monroe (2003) the effectiveness of WID programs is directly linked to ongoing campus-wide communication, collaboration, and support. Warner (2008) highlights the efficacy of interdisciplinary partnerships, namely between business faculty and communication fellows, toward meeting the goals and objectives established at the Weissman Center for International Business. Collaborations between WAC, WID, and Writing Intensive faculty should include interdisciplinary dialogue on how disciplinary texts are produced as well as the difficulty students have in creating them. Nation-wide colleges and universities have instituted Writing Intensive (WI) programs to better respond in meeting the needs of faculty and students alike. Faculty incentives for participation in WI initiatives vary from institution to institution but may include stipends, teaching support, reduced class size, tutorial services, and the opportunity 21 Tw[(to reflect

Writing Fellows Programs

Writing fellows programs can be traced to Brown University in 1981, when Tori Haring-Smith began training undergraduate peer writing tutors to work with specific writing-intensive courses across the curriculum. Basing her new program on “the two fundamental principles of WAC [Writing Across the Curriculum]: shared responsibility among the faculty for helping students learn to write and the association of writing with learning” (Haring-Smith, 1992, p. 123), she set out to establish “a program that would address student as well as faculty attitudes toward writing” (p. 124). This focus on altering both student and faculty perceptions about the nature of academic writing has informed the development of writing fellows programs for the past three decades.

At Brown, as at a number of other institutions, writing fellows read and make written comments on student papers before meeting with students to discuss revision. Except in the case of foreign-language and highly technical courses, Brown writing fellows are not assigned to courses based on their disciplinary expertise. The issue of disciplinary expertise remains the subject of vigorous debate, with some advocating (as does Haring-Smith) for the writing fellow’s role as simply “an educated lay reader” (p. 125) and others arguing that “the knowledgeable tutor—that is the tutor who is familiar with the subject matter of the course—more effectively communicates the various understandings about WAC than the generalist tutor” (Soven, 2001, p. 212). Although writing fellows, as novices, cannot be said to have mastered the discourse of their chosen discipline, they nevertheless understand “that disciplinary knowledge is constructed with language” (Mullin *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, as Thaiss (2001) notes, the “distinctive epistemology and discourse” of different disciplines is “a central argument in support of a cross-curricular writing movement” (p. 313). In a study of writing center tutorials outside a writing fellows program, Kiedaisch and Dinitz (1993) support the notion that the tutor with disciplinary expertise is more likely to know what questions to ask, largely because of her understanding of disciplinary conventions.

Severino and Trachsel, on the other hand, conclude from their experience that “general academic skills of open-minded inquiry, critical analysis, and use of sources to support an argument figured more prominently in teachers’ instructional goals than did specialized discourse skills required for writing as scholars in particular academic disciplines” (2008). Severino and Trachsel draw on a study by Hubbuch (1988) contending that the discourses of all disciplines “can be collected under the umbrella of disciplinary discourse” (p. 27). The disciplines with which Severino and Trachsel work, however, are all housed in the university’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The discourse skills described above may indeed be privileged in traditional academic disciplines; whether or not those skills are transferrable to a business environment, however, is open to question.

The question of disciplinary expertise is closely related to another key issue in peer tutoring, directive vs. non-directive tutoring. The proliferation of writing centers on college campuses in the late 1970s can be attributed partly to the emergence of expressivist theories of composition earlier in the decade, when composition scholars embraced what Elbow (1973) dubbed the “teacherless classroom.” Elbow and others encouraged writing teachers to divest themselves of absolute authority over students’ writing, instead facilitating writing groups in which students acted as interested readers of each other’s work. This theory was articulated with respect to writing centers by North (1984), who saw the purpose of the “new writing center” as

defined “not in terms of some curriculum, but in terms of the writers it serves” (p. 438). Referring to tutors as participant-observers, North characterized tutoring in Socratic terms, with tutor and student writer engaging in dialogue about the process of writing rather than attempting to “fix” a given piece of writing. As expressivist theories gave way to social constructionism, however, the writing center paradigm began to shift from non-directive dialogue to more directive intervention. Social constructionists characterized students as novices seeking entrance into the discourse communities of academic disciplines, arguing that dialogue among students should focus not on student writers finding their own voices but rather on student writers practicing the discourse of the community into which they seek acceptance (Bruffee, 1984). Writing centers were already bastions of the collaborative learning espoused by social constructionists; Shamoon and Burns (1995) argued that directive tutoring—even to the point of the tutor suggesting specific revisions—can facilitate student writers’ entrance into disciplinary discourse communities, “opening up . . . those aspects of practice which had remained unspoken and opaque” (p. 139). Writing fellows programs, given the role of the peer tutor in the classroom, generally accommodate a more directive model of tutoring, one in which the participant role is more prominent than that of observer. Such involvement is necessary in tutoring business writing, a genre that differs significantly from those of the arts and sciences.

Writing fellows programs also require significant investment on the part of faculty. Specifically, fellows can only help students to the extent that everyone—fellow, student, and instructor—understands clearly the parameters of writing assignments, the discourse conventions of the discipline, and the expectations of the individual instructor. Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) found that faculty often mistakenly assume the existence of such a universal entity as “good writing” transcending individual tastes and disciplinary conventions. Connors and Lunsford’s extensive study of instructors marking errors in student papers (1988) debunks this myth, finding that even among composition instructors, the concept of serious error was largely defined by the difficulty instructors faced in explaining the error and the extent to which instructors were annoyed by the error. Zawacki’s analysis of faculty in a writing fellows program (2008) confirms that faculty across disciplines often “believe that they are modeling for students *the* correct way to phrase their sentences rather than, as WID [Writing in the Disciplines] and genre research indicates, a disciplinary way of knowing and writing.” In a successful writing fellows program, “faculty’s awareness of how writing is part of their disciplinary system of activity is no longer tacit. Faculty engage in new practices that reflect thought-provoking fractures in their learned responses to student writing, in their definition of their disciplinary writing, and in their construction of students” (Mullin *et al*, 2008).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given that writing and communication skills are an imperative part of the business curriculum and an integral part of the skill set that college graduates needs for career success, we formulated a set of research questions to explore writing across the business curriculum. With access to both faculty and students, we framed our study around understanding if writing initiatives are producing graduates with excellent writing skills. From students, we sought to understand if they were getting adequate writing instruction in their writing intensive courses by using the writing fellows and writing centers offered in their business courses. From faculty, we

sought information about their writing instruction, the writing fellows program, and the effectiveness of writing intensive courses.

METHODS

This study was exploratory in nature. Four different surveys were used to analyze the effectiveness of writing intensive courses, writing fellows, and general writing in the business curriculum. Data was collected from students and faculty at two eastern US colleges. Open ended surveys as well as more formal, quantitative surveys were used to address our research questions.

The first of two faculty surveys consisted of questions about writing intensive courses and general writing in the business curriculum. University A had 10 participants out of 22 business faculty for a 45% response rate. University B had 9 business faculty out of 11 participate for an 82% response rate. At University A only one participant taught a writing intensive course. At University B three participants taught writing intensive courses. Copies of the all surveys are available upon request.

The second faculty survey was designed to evaluate a specific writing intensive (WI) course with assigned writing fellows (WF) at University A. All faculty teaching this course in the Spring of 2009 completed this survey (100% response rate). Questions measured the use of class time to teach business-style writing, evaluations of the writing fellow assigned to the class, and improvement of student writing as a result of the course.

The first of two student surveys consisted of five open ended response questions where student gave answers in their own words to a variety of questions including the benefits and drawbacks of writing papers, which assignments were most (and least) beneficial) and whether they preferred to write papers individually or in groups. Students from both University A (15 students in an upper level management course) and University B (10 students in an upper level finance course) completed this survey.

The second student survey focused on an introductory business analysis and decision making class at University A. The course is designated Writing Intensive (WI) with a Writing Fellow (WF) assigned to each of the five sections of the class. The survey, completed by all students enrolled in the course in the spring of 2009 (a total of 67 students), focused on the professor, the writing fellow and the writing assignments in general. All students enrolled in the Spring 2009 class (5 sections) were required to complete the survey. Students were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity.

RESULTS

General Writing in Business Programs

Faculty Survey on General Writing in Business

The first faculty survey results are found in Table 1 and the results are not surprising. Faculty reported that the top benefit of incorporating writing into courses was that students learned to apply concepts from the course. Also ranked highly by faculty was students learning

to integrate concepts from the class and students improving on a ‘soft skill’ that is valued in the workplace.

[Insert Table 1]

[Insert Table 2]

Types of writing assignments that faculty administered in their classes varied as shown in Table 2. As evidenced in the table, faculty are incorporating a large amount of writing into their courses. They are also using a wide variety of assignments. Short papers were the most popular form of writing followed by essay tests. In-class writing assignments are also commonly used by faculty. Adding more writing may not be necessary, but improving upon what faculty are already doing may be worthwhile.

As shown in Table 3, the vast majority of faculty reported that students are only required to submit a final writing product. Multiple drafts were used in only one course. This is probably due to the fact that much of the writing students do is in-class or on essay tests. It is surprising with 19 courses using long papers and 16 courses using major research projects that multiple drafts are not more popular. Writing Centers could be used for two drafts, with the first draft focusing on content, organization and higher order concerns and the second draft focusing on spelling and grammar. Writing Center utilization, show in Table 4, is low. While the majority of faculty do not require students to utilize the writing center, a small portion of faculty require students to take one draft of their writing assignment to the writing center. Many faculty do suggest or encourage students to use the writing center, but don’t require students to use the center.

[Insert Table 3]

[Insert Table 4]

Boice (1994) finds faculty resist incorporating writing due to several factors, including increased workload and lack of expertise. Our findings correspond with his results (see Table 5). In this study, faculty reported that time spent on grading as the top drawback of incorporating writing into courses. In addition, time spent on investigating plagiarism, annoyance with errors in spelling and grammar, and lack of confidence in their own expertise as a writer or grammarian were other drawback to incorporating writing into courses.

[Insert Table 5]

Writing Center availability should encourage faculty to include more writing into their courses. However, most faculty do not plan on changing the amount of writing assignments as a result of adding a writing center (see Table 7). Five faculty plan to add short papers, but most are still reluctant to add long or in-depth research papers to their courses. It is likely due to the fact that faculty do not have the time to grade longer papers. Longer papers also require more attention to plagiarism and more grammar/spelling checks, all of the things that were reported as drawbacks to writing assignments. One area for future work may be to explore the reasons that faculty do not see Writing Centers as helpful in addressing these areas.

When asked how satisfied they were with the integration of writing into the business curriculum, faculty reported only moderate satisfaction, as shown in Table 6. Additionally, faculty reported that they would only be ‘moderately likely’ to use a writing fellow if one was

available for their courses. There were some comments that faculty should communicate directly with students and not through an intermediary.

Some other points that came out during the survey are worth noting. Many faculty comments reflected on the poor quality of student writing. It is also evident that faculty do not really understand how writing is integrated into their own programs. Faculty need to communicate with each other on how much, what kind and which courses incorporate writing.

[Insert Table 6]

[Insert Table 7]

Student Survey on General Writing Assignments

To gain additional insight into student attitudes toward writing assignments, 25 students completed an open ended survey about writing in college classes. The top three benefits of writing assignments that students cited were improved communication and writing skills, increased knowledge of the topic and personal expression. Students also mention improved vocabulary, spelling and grammar, research practice, and development of critical thinking skills.

When asked to name at least three things they did not like about paper assignments, students cited assignments could be too long or drawn out and that things can be said in fewer pages than the assignments' specified length. They also stated that they were time consuming and they did not like citing sources, making a bibliography, and writing footnotes.

The majority of students preferred writing individual papers versus group papers. Seventeen respondents preferred individual assignments, five preferred group assignments, two said it depended on who was in the group and one had no preference. For those who preferred writing individually, most had issues with the flow of a group paper, the varied writings styles of group members, and the equality of workloads. Others spoke of not wanting confrontation or conflicting ideas in groups, other people "bringing them down", and feeling constrained when writing in a group. For those students that preferred writing in groups, the stated reasons were team members helping when you get "stuck", requiring less work because everyone can do an excellent job on their individual part, feeling less stressed while writing in a group, being able to bounce ideas around and generate better ideas for the group papers.

When asked to describe the paper assignment they liked the most during their college years, students overwhelmingly stated that they liked assignments where they chose the topic, where it was about them or they were able to express their own opinion, and where the topic was interesting. When asked to describe the paper assignment they liked the least during their college years, students describe assignments as being extremely long, about a topic they were not interested in, and requiring too much research and a bibliography. Note that students did not focus on grammar, spelling, or plagiarism as faculty did.

From this survey, it appears that students recognize industry's focus on the ability to write and that writing assignments are beneficial to them (Gordon, 2006). Given the inconveniences that come with group work, it is not surprising that students like shorter assignments that can be done individually. It is not suggested that faculty remove research papers just because students do not like them. Long research papers are an important tool in writing education and need to be included in the curriculum. Faculty should consider topics that will engage students so they feel that their research efforts are relevant to their educational experience.

Writing Intensive Results

Writing Intensive Course with assigned Writing Fellow (both faculty and students)

Students and faculty at University A participated in an additional survey about a writing fellows program; the results are reported in Table 8. University B is excluded since it does not have a similar program. In contrast to the open-ended student survey, students did not rate individual assignments higher than group assignments. Overall, results from both the student and faculty surveys on University A's writing intensive course (with a designated writing fellow) were positive. This supports Warner's (2008) notion that writing in the discipline programs are effective when business faculty and communication fellows (writing fellows) work together in support of writing efficacy. Most students agreed that faculty taught business style writing. For all assignments, students strongly agreed that assignment content was explained clearly. Students also strongly agreed that the writing fellow offered helpful comments, questions and suggestions for revision of their writing assignments and that as a result of working with the writing fellow, their writing improved. For the most part, each question was rated highly; Faculty responses did not fall below 4.0 (on a scale of 1 to 5); Student responses did not fall below 3.75 (on a scale of 1 to 5). Faculty means were higher than student means on all questions; however, most did not have a statistical difference.

There were three points of significant difference. First, students and faculty did have a significant difference on whether the content of assignments was explained clearly. The student mean was lower than faculty, but still in the agree to strongly agree range. The second difference was on whether assignments were announced two weeks before the due date, allowing ample time to meet with the writing fellow. Because of the multi-part question, it is not known if the students were saying that the assignment was not announced two weeks before the deadline or that two weeks was not ample time to meet with a writing fellow. The student mean was still above 4, which indicates that most agree or strongly agree with the statement.

The final area of significant difference between faculty and students was related to feedback. It must be noted that the faculty survey contained the words "extensive feedback" and the student survey contained the words "useful feedback." Since the student mean was still above 4, most students did agree or strongly agree that feedback given was useful.

[Insert Table 8]

DISCUSSION

While the literature still points out that business college graduates are deficient in their writing skills ("Johnny can't write!") our results point to the progress that is being made in business writing programs. Results from both surveyed schools indicated that faculty use a variety of writing assignments across their business curriculum. Students also recognize the benefits of writing assignments in their classes. And, in a class that integrates the concepts of writing across the curriculum, writing in the disciplines, writing intensive, and writing fellows, results indicated that writing skills are improving. There certainly needs to be more research and communication about how writing is integrated into business curriculums. The results of this study could help with that. Most of the faculty we surveyed do not take advantage of the writing centers on our campuses and have no plans to change the amount or types of writing assignments

they offer to students. Our results, combined with current research (e.g. Vella, 2008), indicate that using the services offered by English and Communication departments will improve business students' writing skills. Perhaps this study and future research will persuade business faculty to utilize the writing resources that are available on college campuses.

It is interesting to note that faculty and students differed on their satisfaction with content (assignments being explained clearly), pacing (timely return of assignments), and feedback clarity of our results were different for faculty and students (see Table 8). This is where writing intensive experts could provide faculty support to improve upon these results. Many colleges and universities have writing intensive and writing across the curriculum programs that beg for utilization by business faculty. Writing centers and writing programs offer business faculty and students a variety of resources. Writing fellows programs place experienced business students in the classroom, ideally with professors for whom they have written. Fellows consult with faculty as they develop writing assignments, meet with students as they draft and revise assignments, and serve as liaisons between students and faculty in clarifying requirements and standards. In centers without writing fellows programs, peer tutors who are business majors can work with individual students on their writing for business courses. Writing center directors and writing program faculty can work with business faculty to develop clear, focused writing assignments and manageable grading rubrics. Writing centers and writing programs can also be a valuable resource to faculty who want to minimize time allotted but maximize effectiveness of evaluating student writing, particularly in responding to drafts.

Faculty satisfaction with integration of writing into the business curriculum is moderate. Many faculty comments reflected on the poor quality of student writing. This might be attributed to the "Johnny can't write" syndrome where faculty members feel students write poorly simply because business writing is a new concept (discourse community) for students and students have not practiced this type of writing enough to be experts. Faculty support for writing fellows was moderate; there were some comments that faculty should communicate directly with students and not through an intermediary. These results support the notion that more collaboration between the disciplines is needed. As McEwen (2003) points out, improving students' writing [is the] collective responsibility of all courses and professors. Monroe (2003) also purports that writing in the disciplines cannot be done in a vacuum. There must be ongoing communication, collaboration and support campus-wide.

Additionally, it should be noted that writing across the disciplines doesn't necessarily mean that every business course should be writing intensive. There needs to be a balance of both qualitative and quantitative instruction within the business disciplines. Communication is essential in all professions, too often it has been overlooked in business management in favor of more analytical course work in which communication competence is often ignored (Flanegin & Rudd, 2000 in McEwen, 2003). Tuleja & Greenhalgh (2008) agree that students need a balance of both quantitative and qualitative skills, e.g. speaking, writing, leadership, teamwork and communication.

LIMITATIONS

As with most research, this study identified areas for further research. Since our sample consisted of data from two colleges, it follows that more data could be collected from varying colleges and writing implementation programs. Broader samples should be used in follow on

studies. In addition, further research should pay close attention to the survey instruments with consistency between faculty and student surveys for comparative purposes.

This study was also cross sectional in nature. It would be interesting to collect data over a longer period of time. For example, we could track the freshman business students over their four years and ask similar questions each year. Also, we could find recent graduates in the workforce and match their writing skills perceptions to those of their employers.

CONCLUSION

The effectiveness of writing initiatives is an important topic for multiple stakeholders. Business needs graduates that can articulate clearly; business schools need to produce graduates with excellent writing skills; colleges and universities need to provide programs that facilitate these needs. Given the importance of soft skills in combination with technical skills for information systems students, it is imperative that educators incorporate them into their curriculum. According to many scholars, there are several ways that this can be done. Cappel (2002) suggests that in order to help students develop these critical skills, faculty can assign “individual and group classroom writings, group projects and presentations, internships, and involvement in student and professional organization [*sic*].” Bailey & Stefaniak (2002) recommend incorporating “comprehensive, holistic, and long-term team exercises and projects” that could include solving customer problems.

Noll & Wilkins (2002) assert that soft skills should be integrated into the curriculum by including “writing, working in a team environment, delivering presentations, managing projects, and developing interpersonal relationships.” Additionally, Quibble & Griffin (2007) recommend focusing instruction on grammar and punctuation rules is a necessary part of teaching written communication skills. Researchers have shown that the ability of students to eliminate their sentence-level errors improved when instruction was combined with other approaches (e.g., in-context writing, sentence combining, glossing, error labeling). It should be recognized that writing skills cannot be developed quickly or easily, but should be the focus of school and college attention across the curriculum, from kindergarten through college (Writing Skills Necessary for Employment, Says Big Business, 2004).

This exploratory study can serve as a springboard for further research into writing in college business curriculums. Our preliminary findings indicate that more work needs to be done integrating the right kinds of writing into appropriate business courses. Future collaboration with writing faculty is a must!

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Table 1: Importance of Writing

	% of responders who ranked item	Average ranking
Students learn to integrate concepts from their courses.	100.0%	2.5
Students have an opportunity to apply concepts from the class	100.0%	2.2
Students improve a 'soft skill' that is valued in the workplace	100.0%	2.5
Students learn to write in a formal manner, rather than in a texting or twitter style	78.9%	3.4
Students build research skills in preparation for graduate school	78.9%	4.5
Students may participate in undergraduate research programs	63.2%	5.7
<i>Note: N = 19. Respondents were asked to rank the most important item as 1, with other items marked in descending order of importance.</i>		

Table 2: Writing Assignments in Business School Courses

	Number of Courses in Which Assignment is Given
Short papers	26
Essay tests	23
in-class writing assignments	22
Written homework problems	19
Long papers	19
Major research project	16
Other	6
None	2
<i>Note: N=19 faculty responders covering all of their courses taught during a typical year.</i>	

Table 3: Structure of Papers - Student Deliverables

	Number of Courses in Which Students Submit . . .
Outline	15
One draft	17
Multiple drafts	1
Final product	32
Other	2
<i>Note: N=19 faculty responders covering all of their courses taught during a typical year.</i>	

Table 4: Utilization of Writing Center in Business School Courses

	Number of Courses in which Students Use Writing Center
Not at all	27
Students take one draft to the Center	15
Students take multiple drafts to the Center	1
Students take multiple drafts and final product to the Center	1
Other	7
<i>Note: N=19 faculty responders covering all of their courses taught during a typical year.</i>	

Table 5: Drawbacks to Writing

	% of responders who ranked item	Average ranking
Time spent on grading	84.2%	1.7
Annoyance with errors in spelling and grammar	73.7%	3.1
Frustration with reading papers without a topic sentence or logical organization	68.4%	3.1
Time spent investigating plagiarism	63.2%	3.1
Trouble with subjective grading	63.2%	3.9
Late submittals by students	47.4%	5.2
Lack of confidence in own expertise as a writer or a grammarian	26.3%	5.6
Difficulty finding a way to make writing relevant to the course material	26.3%	5.8
<i>Note: N = 19. Respondents were asked to rank the most important item as 1, with other items marked in descending order of importance.</i>		

Table 6: General Faculty View on Writing and Writing Fellows

Overall, how satisfied are you with the integration of writing into the business curriculum?	3.5
How likely would you be to use a Writing Fellow if one was available for your course?	3.7
<i>Note: N=19. Answers range from 5=Very Satisfied to 1=Very Dissatisfied or 5=Very Likely to 1=Very Unlikely</i>	

Table 7: Changes or Additions to Business School Courses as a Result of Having a Writing Center

	Number of Courses in which an Assignment has been Added
Essay tests	1
in-class writing assignments	2
Written homework problems	1
Short papers	5
Long papers	2
Major research project	0
Other	4
None	22
<i>Note: N=19 faculty responders covering all of their courses taught during a typical year.</i>	

Table 8: Survey of Students and Faculty in BUS1100 (Essentials of Business Analysis & Decision Making) an Introductory Writing Intensive course (with Writing Fellows and Writing Center)

	Faculty Mean	Student Mean	
Class time was used to teach business-style writing	4.00	3.82	
Written guidelines were provided (either hard copy or on Blackboard)	4.75	4.43	
The content was explained clearly	4.65	4.22	**
The writing format was explained clearly (including documentation style)	4.30	3.99	
Assignments were announced two weeks before due date, allowing ample time to meet with the writing fellow	4.70	4.01	***
Assignments were graded and returned within a week	4.60	4.31	
Extensive, useful feedback was provided	4.75	4.31	**
Students were required to meet with the writing fellow	4.40	4.23	
Instruction was provided for working collaboratively in groups	4.40	4.24	
Instruction was provided for group work in merging individual sections into a single, consistent document	4.00	3.76	
As a result of these assignments, student writing improved	4.40	4.17	
The writing fellow provided students several options for meeting times	4.40	3.97	
The writing fellow offered helpful comments, questions and suggestions for revision	4.05	4.02	
As a result of working with the writing fellow, student writing improved	4.60	3.97	
<p><i>Note: N=5 faculty, 66 students. Responses are on a scale ranging from 5=Strongly Agree to 1=Strongly Disagree. ** indicates the difference is statistically significant at the 5% level; *** indicates difference is significant at the 1% level.</i></p>			