CAPC Writing-Emphasis Courses - Frequently Asked Questions

What criteria must a course meet to be officially designated as a writing-emphasis course?
There are 11 criteria that a course must meet at the time of seeking WE-designation and in each instance the course it taught. New criteria were revised and approved by CAPC in December 2016, so courses that haven't been reviewed by CAPC since that time may need to be updated. You can find the complete list of criteria here:
https://www.wcupa.edu/viceProvost/writingAcrossCurriculum/criteria.aspx

What exactly is it about writing that I am supposed to be teaching in a writing-emphasis course?
Writing in upper-division undergraduate courses is balancing both *general writing skills* and *discipline-specific writing skills*. Students have been learning the general skills of writing for much of their lives, but as ideas and course material becomes more complex the ability to write about those complicated ideas clearly becomes more difficult. Students need to write regularly in their coursework in order to maintain and build on general writing skills. Such skills include sound organization of ideas, logic and coherence in argumentation, identification of appropriate genre conventions (like formality, point-of-view, and audience), and adherence to the grammar and mechanics expectations of the writing situation. Most undergraduate students have never learned discipline-specific writing skills.

What constitutes "multiple, significant writing" in a writing emphasis course?
There should be at least two (but probably more) writing-intensive assignments in a writing-emphasis course and these assignments should be significant to the course grade as well as significant to the student's learning in the course. One way to think about this is that students will experience both formal writings (such as a scholarly research paper) and informal writings (such as reading reflections, journaling, in-class brainstorming prompts, etc.) Writing-emphasis courses teach students how to think about course content through writing (writing-to-learn) and also give students opportunities to practice the ways of writing in the discipline or field under study. If you would like to know more about informal writing-to-learn assignments, please check out this resource:
https://www.wcupa.edu/viceProvost/writingAcrossCurriculum/designingInformalWriting.aspx

Why should notation of writing lessons be included on my course calendar?
It is essential that writing-emphasis courses don't just assign writing but also teach writing. Almost all courses involve writing but this does not make them writing-emphasis designated courses. Writing-emphasis courses are designated as such because the offer discipline-specific writing instruction for a faculty member that has expertise and experience writing in the discipline or field understudy. By including writing lessons on the course calendar in your syllabus you are signaling to students and other faculty with who you share your syllabus that writing instruction is part of the course content and not just a method of assessment. In-class lesson on your course calendar might include: how to use a particular citation style; how writers in your field typically construct introductions/arguments/conclusions; discipline-specific grammar nuances such as point-of-view and preferred tense, etc. Some disciplines have created writing-guides for their

students that you might consider utilizing:
https://www.wcupa.edu/viceProvost/writingAcrossCurriculum/resourcesStudents.aspx

What are the expectations pertaining to goals and learning objectives in a writing emphasis course?
All writing-emphasis courses should have three goals notated on syllabi:
- an instructor-generated goal about writing;
- general education goal #1 (effective communication); and,
- general education goal #2 (critical and analytical thinking).

In addition to listing general education goals 1 and 2, a course syllabus should also identify at least one goal-associated student-learning-objective (SLO) for each goal. This means that at least one SLO associated with general education goal 1 and at least one SLO associated with general education goal 2 should be included on the syllabus.

Lastly, faculty should identify which assignments in the course will help students achieve each goal-associated SLO. This may be in table or narrative form but it should be clear to students, faculty, and program reviewers that the associated assignments could meaningfully and reasonably achieve the objectives with which it has been associated.

Here is a poor example:

General Education Goal #1: Students will learn to communicate effectively.
Associated SLO: Demonstrate comprehension of and ability to explain information and ideas accessed through reading.
Associated Assignment: Multiple choice reading exam.

Here is a better example**:**

General Education Goal #1: Students will learn to communicate effectively.
Associated SLO: Demonstrate comprehension of and ability to explain information and ideas accessed through reading.
Associated Assignment: Scholarly article reflection essay.

In the example above we can see that a multiple-choice reading exam might reasonably provide students an opportunity to "demonstrate comprehension" of "ideas accessed through reading" but given that it is multiple-choice, could not possibly allow students to demonstrate the "ability to explain information and ideas accessed through reading" because multiple-choice is not student explanation.

Faculty should make sure that goals and associated SLOs can meaningfully and reasonably achieve the objectives with which it has been associated.

Should I be building peer feedback on writing, instructor feedback on writing, or both into my writing-emphasis courses?

Both. It is at the full discretion of faculty how to incorporate revision and feedback into writing-emphasis courses. Students learn to write by revising and rewriting works that they have already written, and it is this return to already written work that we want to encourage in writing emphasis courses. This may mean providing students feedback on a full-draft of an essay, this may mean checking in on small parts of an essay (feedback on an introduction paragraph for example), or this may mean allowing students to rewrite assignments after receiving a grade.

It is important to acknowledge that faculty have expertise that peers do not, so the method of feedback should be appropriate to the occasion. For example, peers might give great feedback on typos, style, and clarity of idea, but are less prepared to give feedback on whether or not a work is meeting the expectations of scholarship in the field or discipline understudy.

Are there resources I can use for planning a writing-emphasis course, checking to make sure a writing-emphasis course is doing what it should, or general support for teaching writing across the curriculum?
There are many such resources.
- You can visit WCUPA.edu/writing where you will find many resources for both faculty and students
- You can visit the WCU University Writing Program Resources page on D2L
- You can contact the University Writing Council and Advisory Board representative for your college: https://www.wcupa.edu/viceProvost/writingAcrossCurriculum/UWC.aspx
- You can contact the Writing Across the Curriculum Director Justin Rademaekers, JRademaekers@wcupa.edu