

Information re GER Alignment of English across the UA System:

Faculty Senate--

This message is from Sarah Stanley who directs University Writing, a position that works with an English Department committee to oversee the required GER writing courses. Current capacity in the English Department includes 21 TAs who teach the majority of GER writing course offerings, with adjunct faculty teaching online and a few face-to-face sections each semester. In addition, a handful of English Department faculty also teach a section or two of 111x, 211x, or 213x. UAF currently supports one Writing Studies faculty member (Stanley) who has been the supervisor of these graduate students for 6+ years, and Stanley currently is working at max capacity. Stanley directs a program which operates in a transparent and open manner--and all lesson plans, outcomes, and assessment reports can be found at [write.alaska.edu](http://write.alaska.edu). Evidence of undergraduate writing showing signs of every assessable criteria over the course of our programmatic writing sequence is attached to this email. The Vice Provost has used our assessment procedures as an exemplar for Northwest Accreditors.

Yet, two years ago, we found ourselves in a situation where we were mandated to align with UAA and UAS regarding our GER writing courses. To some on faculty senate, I believe the assumption was that course names and titles and outcomes should not cause much harm and is one way to appease mandated changes which may threaten distinct campus cultures.

In our 2-year alignment process, we quickly discovered just how different the institutions are, and these differences are clearest in regard to the responsibility of writing courses. UAA relies on term, tenure track, and adjunct faculty to teach the majority of their GER courses; and while they do have a small cohort of teaching assistants every year--it is 20% of what we have at UAF. UAS does not have a graduate program and so no graduate teachers.

The 212 course has long been offered at UAA as a GER and we were being told to create mirror images of another campus' course offerings. As a system wide effort we found agreement by creating horizontal and vertical alignment. UAA was enthusiastic about a "writing in the disciplines" model for these 200-level courses, a vision that maintains the 211, 212, and 213 offerings in number but changes their focus entirely. These are no longer "about" courses; they are "and" courses. Some in the alignment discussions wanted to discard the 214 Persuasive Writing course. However, Rich, Cindy, and Sarah all pointed out that while "on paper" fewer courses appear to be a good idea; it is not possible given our current resources--the 214 persuasive writing course seemed to fit the needs and resources of our campus quite well. We asked:

- How are we to ensure expert training in three distinct disciplines with our current program capacity?
- How will graduate students looking to study literature or hone their craft in creative writing know how to help undergraduates write and think in the genres of disciplines?
- Is this kind of apprentice level attention to writing the English Department's job?
- What about the recently passed communication outcomes in UAF faculty senate?

UAF argued successfully to maintain a 214 writing course with the intent to help this course grow and provide value to all UAF degrees. In fact, Stanley reached out to all "w" intensive faculty last year and shared with anyone who followed up with her, the vision behind this course. Stanley came to faculty senate to speak about the Communication Outcomes and shared how the 200-level writing courses were shifting their focus to support Outcome #3--Translate disciplinary content to audience outside the discipline, when appropriate. The Composition Committee last year worked hard to highlight the goals of UAF's writing program--and the excellent work that teachers behind the program are doing. Most of what we've been able to accomplish through the years is a result of allowing graduate students some flexibility to pitch theme-based writing

courses in areas of their own expertise, in areas where they can lead their students through an in-depth discussion about topics across disciplinary interest.

**SUMMARY:** Our current writing curricula and support of that curricula is optimal for our current resources. Neither Stanley **nor anyone she has met at UAF** has the expertise (a dissertation and scholarly interest) in the field of professional and technical writing. Without such a person, who would create a supportive structure for mentoring and developing the curricula for TAs to teach 212X with any kind of assurance on quality of instruction and assessable outcomes?

Given this situation, and the difference in our writing programs, the addition of 212 as an option for the 200-level course raises capacity concerns at UAF.

### **Stanley's Position**

Given UAF's capacity issues, as programmatic leader, I see strategic growth in making more visible current practice--a 214 course focused on argument across contexts--a way of thinking I see undergraduates struggling with. We need to help them with refining and asserting their perspective in academic and public conversations surrounding "persuasive situations," from generalized to specific audiences. Moreover, the 214 course is aligned with recently passed baccalaureate communication outcomes.

In 2017-2018, we will be offering TA led 214 courses. These courses will continue to be excellent as they will reflect custom designed courses with a scaffolded curriculum--the courses are selected by the Composition Committee and each TA receives one-on-one coaching from an experienced faculty member. The 214 course number reflects what we were doing already in 211 and 213 courses; however, now because of alignment the previous 211 and 213 courses will not be offered by TAs. The scope and focus of these courses has now changed to reflect a writing in the disciplines model.

There will be online offerings of 211, 212, and 213. I imagine that other UAF campuses will begin to offer 212. The online offering will need to be approved by the Composition Committee and be aligned with the new course outcomes. Current courses will have to undergo a redesign. We will need to hire a tenure-track professional and technical faculty member to assist in the training and development of a 212 course because this course clearly will be in high demand at UAF for certain degree programs.

I believe that 214 is the strongest option given the resources and commitment of the people behind it. I'm excited to teach it myself and to inspire a legion of teachers to teach it as well. Join us in creating a culture of writing at UAF--join our committee, join in on the assessment, teach with us. All perspectives are welcome.

Thank you,

Sarah

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