

## **POLICY AND APPLICATION PROCEDURE FOR SPECIAL "W" (WRITING INTENSIVE) DESIGNATIONS**

This document explains the policy and procedure governing student requests to receive "W" (writing-intensive) credit for courses taken at Muhlenberg and elsewhere that lack the formal W designation. Requests should be directed to the Writing Program Committee (not the Curriculum Committee) in care of either David Rosenwasser or Jill Stephen in the English Department.

Generally, special W designations are only approved when the student can demonstrate that it would be a hardship to meet the requirement with Muhlenberg courses already designated as Ws. The student needs also to demonstrate that the course proposed for special W designation clearly meets all of Muhlenberg's W requirements--an enrollment cap of twenty students, and at least fifteen pages of analytical writing broken into a minimum of three assignments, including a revision based on the professor's written comments about the student's thinking in the paper (i.e., not simply about grammar and style). See the college catalogue for more information about the writing requirement.

### **How to Apply For A Special W Designation:**

Although procedures vary according to the type of request, they all share, as the most important element of the student's application, the following: a letter detailing the exceptional circumstances that prohibit him or her from satisfying the three-W college writing requirement through existing Muhlenberg W courses. The letter should include the student's I.D. number, his or her year in school, and the full course number of the course to be assigned W credit. The letter should also offer a fairly detailed description of the writing done in the course, demonstrating how it satisfies Muhlenberg's requirements for W courses.

1. A student who wishes to take a writing intensive course at another institution for W credit must demonstrate after completing the course that it meets Muhlenberg W guidelines. Such courses cannot, in other words, be pre-approved. Students are, however, encouraged to consult with Professors Rosenwasser or Stephen about the suitability of particular courses before enrolling. See Frequently Asked Questions below.

The student should append to his or her letter of request a portfolio containing a syllabus and copies of papers, preferably with professor's comments. If these are not available, the student should secure a supporting letter from the course's professor that briefly describes the amount and kind of writing done, including attention to revision.

2. A student who desires W credit for an already completed Muhlenberg course that was not officially a W should follow the same procedures as in 1 (above)--submitting a letter of request, syllabus, and portfolio--but also must include a letter of support from the instructor.

3. A student seeking pre-approved W credit for a Muhlenberg course that is not a W should supply, in addition to his or her letter of request, a letter of support from the professor teaching the course that also indicates how the professor will make special provision for the student to satisfy W requirements.

4. A transfer student who has met the first year writing requirement at his or her previous institution will, in most cases, automatically receive a one-course W credit (in place of the W attached to all Muhlenberg first-year seminars). There is one exception: a student who transfers in fewer than seven course units (and so is classified as first-year) will still be required to take a first-year seminar.

A transfer student wishing to petition for additional W credit for previous coursework will need to supply the relevant course descriptions from the catalogue of the other institution, in addition to his or her letter of request and portfolio (as described in 1).

5. In requests for W credit for an independent study, in addition to the procedures described above, the student also needs to petition the Curriculum Committee (CC) for a waiver of the rule that an

independent study cannot satisfy a general academic requirement. Such petitions should explain to CC the exceptional circumstances that underlie the request. Students should submit the CC petition to the Office of the Dean of Academic Life, where it will be held until the separate request for Special W designation has been approved, at which point the Dean will bring the petition to the CC. (CC petition forms are available at the offices of this Dean or the Registrar.)

### **Frequently Asked Questions:**

*Why can't I get W credit for any course in which I do a significant amount of writing?*

While the college encourages students to develop their writing skills in virtually all of their courses, W courses make writing central to the learning that goes on in the course. That's why W courses adhere to specific guidelines, such as an enrollment cap of twenty students and the inclusion of revision. It is the position of the Writing Program Committee that adding extra writing to a non-W course or independent study does not necessarily make it equivalent to the kind of shared and often collaborative learning experience for which writing-intensive courses are designed. In addition, the Committee believes that the great majority of students can easily meet the graduation requirement of three W courses with existing W offerings (roughly forty available each semester).

*Can I take a composition course elsewhere to meet one of the required Ws?*

Because the Committee sees writing as profoundly contextual--occurring within a discipline and related to a particular subject--it does not generally grant W credit for introductory composition courses, where the writing assignments are often not sufficiently analytical or grounded in significant course content.

An exception to this rule applies to transfer students who took introductory composition at their previous institution. They will normally receive W credit for this course (so long as they transfer in at least seven course units) as the equivalent of the W attached to all sections of Muhlenberg's First-Year Seminar. Such students do not need to apply to the Writing Program Committee for this W credit: it will be assigned by the Transfer Student Coordinator and the Registrar.

Note: students who transfer in a two-semester course in composition generally receive a single W, even if they are granted two course units of graduation credit.

Those transfer students who have taken both composition and a first-year seminar or other content-centered writing-intensive course at their previous institution can receive a W for each course. In such cases, the student must demonstrate that the seminar or other course satisfies Muhlenberg's W requirements (following the procedure in item 1 above).

*Can I transfer in a course other than composition to meet one of the required Ws?*

Yes, provided it meets all W guidelines. Such transfer requests cannot, however, be approved in advance (see item 1 in the procedures above). Note: transfer Ws can't count as the third W (to be designated by the major) without the department's approval.

Remember: all requests for special W designation, along with portfolio and other supporting materials, must be submitted to the Writing Program Committee (addressed to David Rosenwasser or Jill Stephen, co-directors of Writing Across the Curriculum, in care of the English Department). Decisions will be made and all materials returned as quickly as possible. Contact either co-director with questions about policy or procedure.