Policy Recommendation for Course Designation: Writing Emphasis

I. Purpose

This policy establishes the criteria and procedures for designating a course as a *Writing Emphasis (WE)* course. The designation is intended to recognize and promote academic courses that integrate meaningful writing assignments with sound instruction and reflection to enrich student success, foster disciplinary knowledge, and strengthen student writing.

CURRENT: Currently, Kean University does have a formal designation for Writing Emphasis (WE) courses. However, no formal description exists specifying what that designation entails. Without clear and consistent criteria, tracking, assessing, and supporting faculty and student participation in writing-emphasis courses across the curriculum is difficult. Additionally, the absence of consistent designation and criteria can lead to confusion for faculty seeking to integrate writing assignments into their courses and for students wishing to understand program and graduation requirements.

CURRENT CATALOG DESCRIPTION: To graduate, all students are required to complete at least one "Writing Emphasis" course within their major. Such courses are designed to provide the students with an opportunity to explore writing as it is done in their chosen field. Typically, Writing Emphasis courses are taken in the junior or senior year, after the student's initial composition courses are completed. Students should consult their major program advisor for specific information about the Writing Emphasis course requirement.

PROPOSED: A formal Writing Emphasis (WE) course designation description is proposed. The WE designation will recognize and elevate courses that intentionally integrate pedagogically sound writing instruction that aligns with Kean's mission as an urban research institution. Further, the WE course designation supports the university's goal of integrating writing instruction across the curriculum.

II. Definition of Writing Emphasis

The current catalog description enclosed above, approved during the Spring 2025 semester, offers specifics on the nature of Writing Emphasis (WE) courses. In more general terms:

WE courses **are**...

- opportunities to learn and practice disciplinary norms for the writing process, including what counts as a "text" and as "writing" in a given discipline
- process-based, incorporating space for invention, drafting, peer review, and revision
- required only once in each degree program, building on the two WE-designated courses within the General Education (GE) program

WE courses are **not**…

- product-driven classes graded only on a final paper
- classes with high-stakes essays that cannot be revised
- purely theoretical or classroom-based explorations of disciplinary issues
- courses where the content overshadows the writing

III. Core Criteria for WE Course Designation

A course must meet **all** the following criteria to receive the WE designation:

1. **Volume:** Students generate at least 25 pages (~6,000 words) over the course of the semester across at minimum four assignments, including low-stakes writing and revised drafts. *[Note: Disciplinary texts differ greatly across academia, especially in programs within design fields and the performing arts. Thus, adjustments to this standard will be possible with prior approval of the Writing Emphasis Committee, under the guidance of the Provost.]*
2. **Feedback and revision:** At least three assignments which each require at least one revision.
3. **Peer engagement:** Students serve as respondents to peer work via exchanged drafts, in-class critique, and/or group editing sessions.
4. **Sensitivity to disciplinary norms:** Students learn the expectations of writing specific to the discipline offering the course.
5. **Emphasis:** Writing should be a clearly announced subject of study in the class.

IV. Application and Approval Process

1. **Proposal Submission.** Departments seeking the WE designation for a particular course must submit a *WE Course Designation Application* to the Writing Emphasis Committee for curriculum approval. The application must include:
   a. Course outline
   b. Detailed course syllabus
   c. Description of all writing assignments, including low-stakes writing-to-learn activities
   d. Evidence of revision policies and practices
   e. Assessment and reflection methods
2. **Preparation, Review, and Approval.** The Writing Emphasis Committee, in collaboration with each Department Curriculum Committee, will support instructors in developing strong applications before submission, review applications, and recommend approval or revisions. WE applicants are encouraged to consult with the Writing Emphasis Committee before submitting.
3. **Renewal and Reevaluation.** As part of the normal course-refresh process, WE course designations will be reevaluated each time a course goes to Curriculum Committee for approval.

V. Recognition and Support

Courses approved for WE designation will:

- Be tagged in the university's course catalog and registration system
- Be eligible for institutional support and faculty development opportunities
- Be limited to enrollment of no more than 25 students per section
- Receive recognition in annual reappointment packages

- Contribute toward institutional goals for writing across the curriculum
- Be supported through the Center for Teaching Excellence and the NTLC's Writing Center.

VI. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed initially after three years, then every **five years** thereafter, by the University Senate in collaboration with the Writing Emphasis Committee to ensure alignment with institutional priorities and evolving best practices in writing pedagogy.